No. 274 / DECEMBER 1995

THE NI
NEW INTERNATIONALIST

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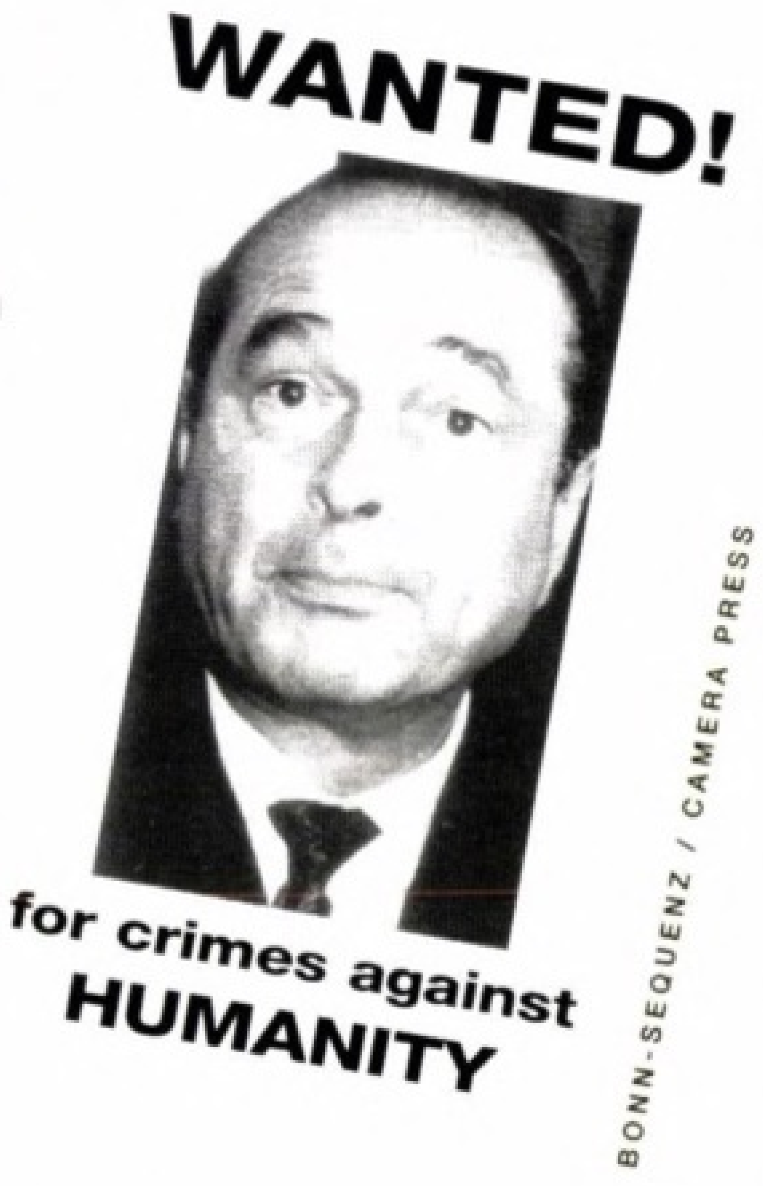

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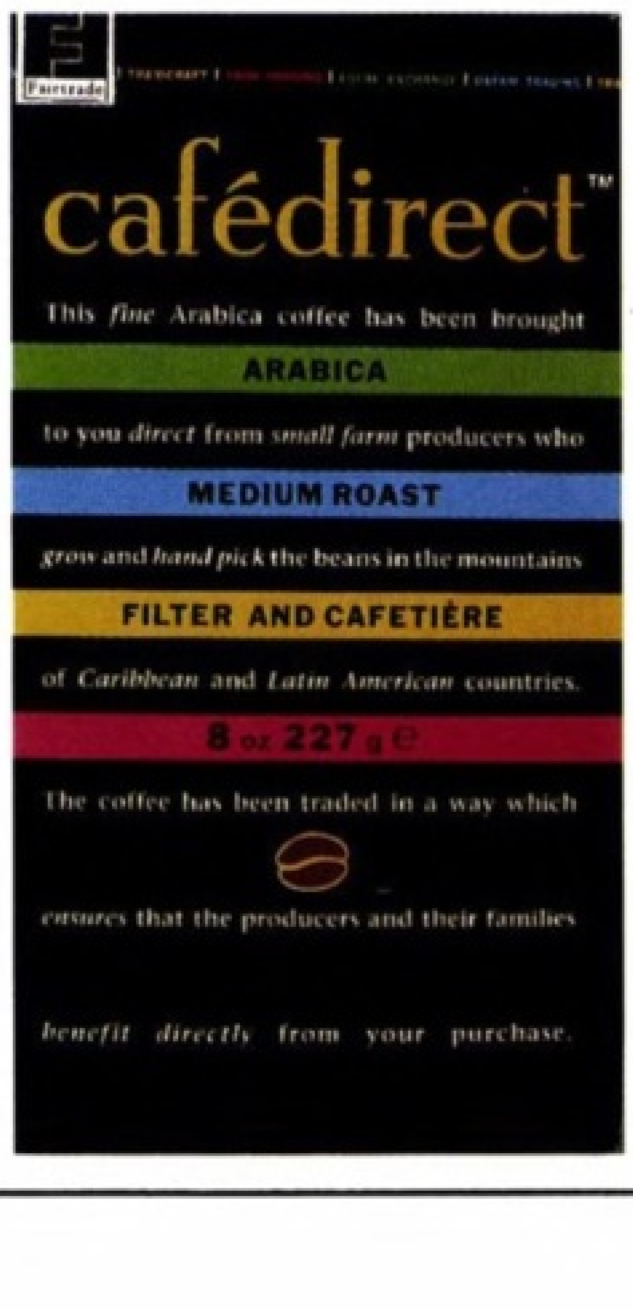
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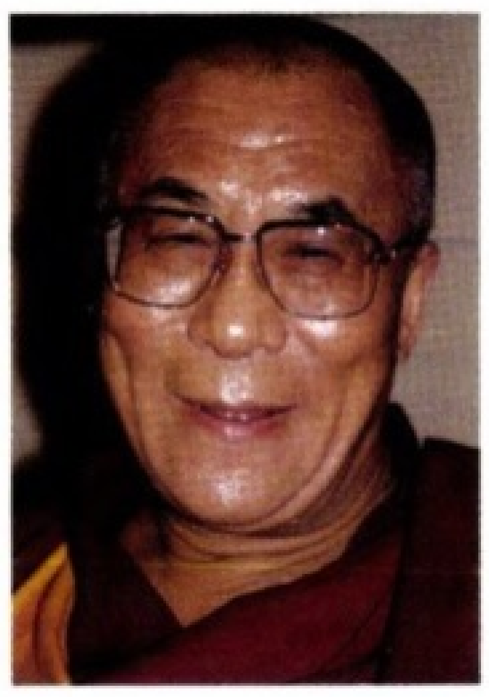
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MAGAZINE DESIGNED BY **ALAN HUGHES**
FRONT COVER PHOTOGRAPH OF TENDOL, A TIBETAN NUN IN EXILE IN NEPAL, BY **TIM NUNN**

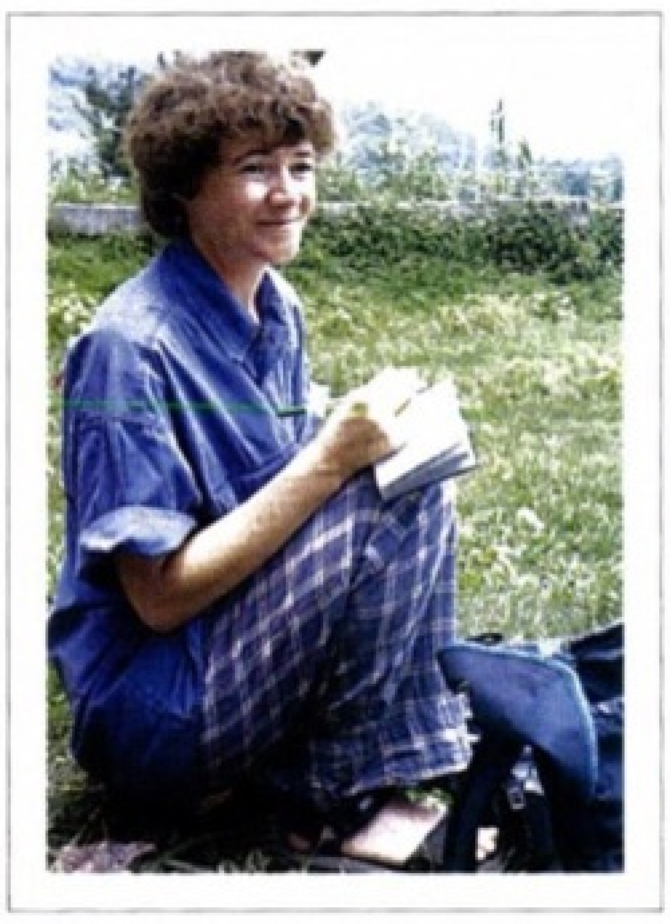
THIS MONTH'S **THEME**

Tibet

FROM THIS MONTH'S **EDITOR**

'TIBET' – even while preparing to sneak into the country to research this report, the word kept conjuring up romantic and exotic images in my mind. This was to be a trip to the 'Roof of the World', the 'Forbidden Kingdom', the mythical 'Shangri-La'. The Himalayan home of a peace-loving, unworldly people, who smile a lot and believe in a god-king they call the Dalai Lama. The mythology surrounding Tibet was powerful, and I was as susceptible to it as anyone.

But I was also getting another, quite different, set of images – coming mainly from action-group bulletins and newsletters. The recent case of Sherab Ngawang, for instance, a 15-year-old political prisoner who was beaten to death because she 'pulled a face' at one of her Chinese guards. Or Palden Gyatso, a Tibetan monk who earlier this year came to the West to show reporters his nefarious collection of torture instruments. They were the kind used against him by his Chinese jailers over the course of 30 years, and he had obtained them by bribing guards.


CHRIS WADE

These two sets of images – the romantic and the horrific – do not sit easily together. And the first set may well have done the cause of the Tibetan people more harm than good. If Tibetans are presented as a dreamy, unrealistic people, obsessed with religion, their struggle is unlikely to be taken seriously by a world driven by more secular values. Their demand for independence will be seen as pie-in-the-sky and their ability to rule themselves will be open to question.

Meanwhile, frustration is mounting among many Tibetans as they see their country no nearer to regaining its independence than it was at the time of the Chinese invasion 45 years ago. Some are asking how much longer Buddhist patience and non-violent resistance can hold out – is resort to the gun the only way to get heard in a violent world?

I had to get into Tibet if I were to gain any real sense of the conditions under which Tibetans are currently living. But working there had its difficulties. I had never before been in a country where surveillance was so intense and informer networks so organized that you really were putting locals at risk just by talking with them. Even Pinochet's Chile seemed safer in this respect.

It's one of the many ways in which China tries to stop real information about Tibet reaching the rest of the world. This issue of **NI** tries to get that information out by its own route – going first to Kathmandu to interview recent Tibetan escapees; then furtively into Tibet itself; and finally to Dharamsala, home of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile.

Vanessa Baird

Vanessa Baird
for the ***New Internationalist*** *Co-operative*

Letters

The New Internationalist welcomes your letters. But please keep them short. They may be edited for purposes of space or clarity. Include a home telephone number if possible and send your letters to the nearest editorial office. The address is inside the front cover.

Trying our best

While you were right to point out in your issue on *Medicine* (**NI 272**) that in the end doctors can't do much to help most sick people, many of whom will get better anyway, I do believe that most of us try our best and are only too aware of our limitations. Certainly there is no incentive for a National Health Service doctor like me to pretend to cure illnesses which are self-limiting and need no treatment, but patients are strangely reluctant to accept this and feel cheated if they leave the surgery without a prescription.

THE NI
NEW INTERNATIONALIST
Medicine
Cure or curse

Dr John Hodgson
Sutton Coldfield, England

Printer's devil

In your magazine on *Medicine* (**NI 272**) you state on page 29 that the number of children who die each year is 133 million. I suspect this is ten times too large. A recent copy of UNICEF facts and figures put this figure at 40,000. Call it 35,000 and the figure is around 13 million.

R H Eldridge
Kettering, England

Editor: Apologies, you are quite right! This figure is thankfully lower than we stated though any death statistic is always too high.

Factory Direct

Your articles in *Coffee* (**NI 271**) clearly state that most profits are still in the hands of the conventional processors. You also state that consumers are paying higher prices for coffee from fair trading organizations. It would seem that it is the consumer's added costs which become the increased profits seen by the growers.

The issue seemed to imply that there are also a lot of intermediaries using social consciousness to subsidize change in the system. If meaningful change is to occur then the spread of profits of the middle persons need to be shrunk with the net savings passed back to the producers and forward to the consumers.

'Factory Direct' should be cheaper to the consumers and more profitable to the producer. Organic production, which uses fewer external inputs, should also be cheaper than chemically intensive production, yielding higher environmental returns and greater net benefit to both producers and consumers.

Tom Abeles
Minneapolis, US

Universal culprit

I am an expatriate Canadian citizen living in New South Wales. Since 1968 I have been deluding myself into believing I had settled for unacceptable racism, rather than an unacceptable climate. Now, after reading your shocker about the Cree Indians in Alberta (*Update* **NI 271**) I have to ask if there is any country free of this ongoing racial abomination?

The list of who or what is to blame for perpetuating the myth that primitive peoples are less than human must be both staggering and terrifying.

It would have to include most people and their institutions that traditionally have been considered inviolate: parents, schools, churches, governments. Patriotism, with its arrogance, flag-waving and appalling record of violence would I suspect, emerge as the universal culprit.

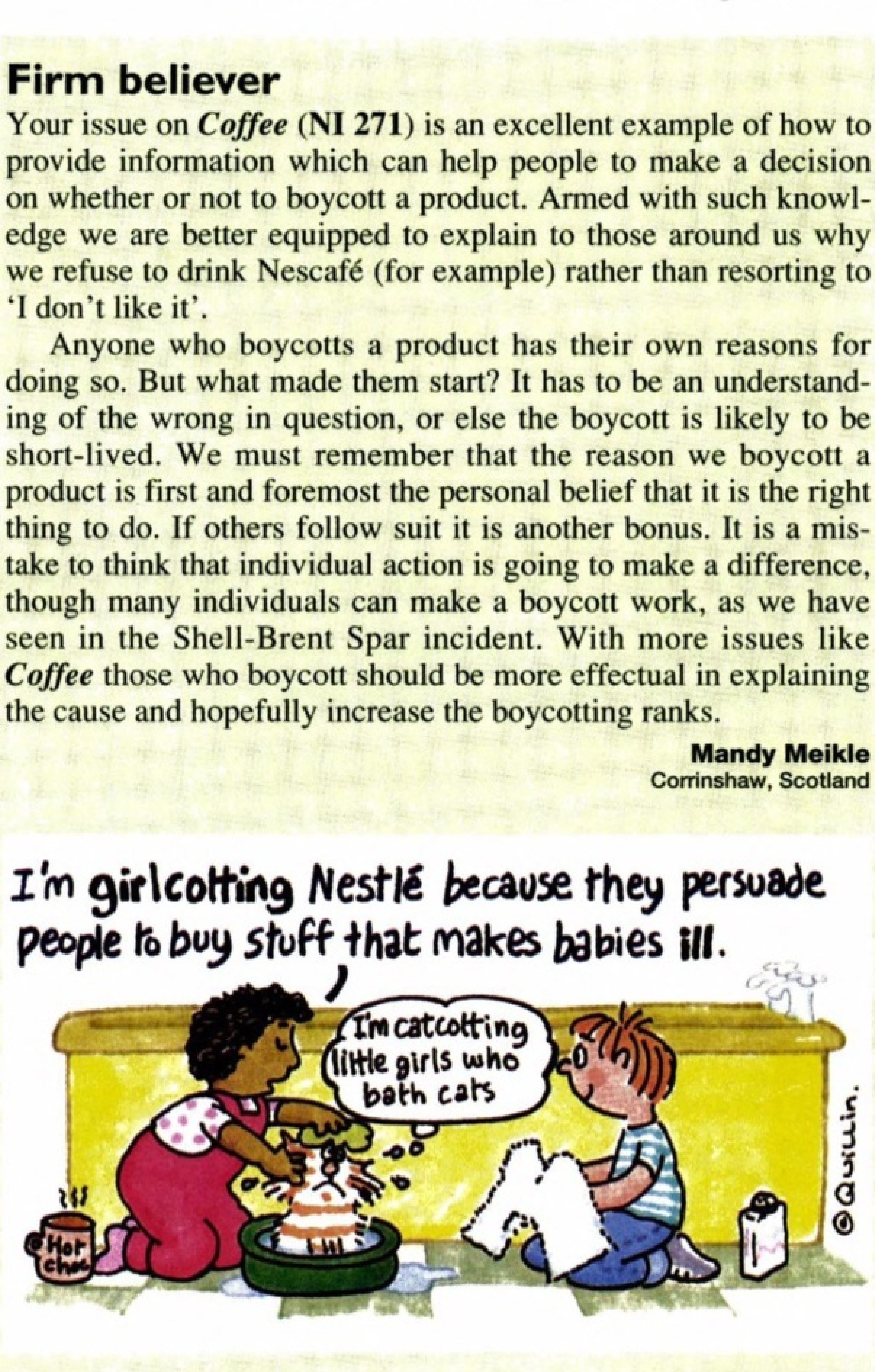
Lloyd Smith
Mullumbimby, Australia

Firm believer

Your issue on *Coffee* (**NI 271**) is an excellent example of how to provide information which can help people to make a decision on whether or not to boycott a product. Armed with such knowledge we are better equipped to explain to those around us why we refuse to drink Nescafé (for example) rather than resorting to 'I don't like it'.

Anyone who boycotts a product has their own reasons for doing so. But what made them start? It has to be an understanding of the wrong in question, or else the boycott is likely to be short-lived. We must remember that the reason we boycott a product is first and foremost the personal belief that it is the right thing to do. If others follow suit it is another bonus. It is a mistake to think that individual action is going to make a difference, though many individuals can make a boycott work, as we have seen in the Shell-Brent Spar incident. With more issues like *Coffee* those who boycott should be more effectual in explaining the cause and hopefully increase the boycotting ranks.

Mandy Meikle
Corrinshaw, Scotland


I'm girlcotting Nestlé because they persuade people to buy stuff that makes babies ill.
I'm catcotting little girls who bath cats
Hot choc
© Quillin

VIV QUILLIN

Algerian women

Issues such as the Family Law of 1984 and shelters for victims of domestic violence have no part in ordinary Algerian women's lives ('Women on the Edge of Time' **NI 270**). No change in the legal system is going to change society's attitudes overnight.

The fundamental problems facing Algerian women today, aside from the civil unrest, are 1) Water rationing – four days without water is common in many parts of Oran, 2) Childbirth – appalling conditions in the maternity units and badly administered contraception and 3) Illiteracy – illiterate women know they are oppressed but lack the tools to express themselves in an organized way. Unfortunately the majority of literate women in Algeria are not campaigning for issues which really affect ordinary women.

Algeria's big problem is not Islamic fundamentalists but rather the inability of individuals to assume responsibility for their actions past and present. It would be over optimistic to assume that the imminent Presidential elections will do much to change this or indeed the conditions endured by millions of ordinary Algerian women every day.

Frances Amrani
Cambridgeshire, England

Bigotry

Following the decision of the Zimbabwe Book Fair's organisers to capitulate to the Government's strong-arm tactics over gay participation (the theme this year being 'Human Rights and Justice'), we now have the appalling scenario of the country's President openly calling for homosexual Zimbabweans to be hounded out of the country or arrested.

The vicious bigotry involved defies imagination – except for those who still like to suggest that the 'dark continent' is full of uncivilised primitives. By scapegoating minority groups on a minority basis (the Ndebele in 1984; whites, just before the last elections; gay Zimbabweans at the moment) Mugabe gives nothing but credence to that suggestion. Maybe he should consider graceful retirement, and let younger and more capable members of his party take the reins. His hanging-on is proving more and more of an embarrassment.

Richard Flynn
Cambridge, England

Seeking solutions

I always find your magazine both uplifting and depressing. Uplifting because at least someone cares. Depressing because I suspect most **NI** readers already share your worldview.

What we don't know – or at least don't agree on – is what to do. At least communism had clearly defined visions of action and resistance. But what is there now? Buying organic vegetables at your local supermarket? Dropping out and getting into crystals? Should armed struggle still be on the agenda? Can there be such a thing as a green consumer or is consumerism the core of the problem?

Maybe you could devote an issue to 'Solutions'. Or a regular section, with responses from readers and analysis of different strategies. Surely better than a review of Boy George's latest album.

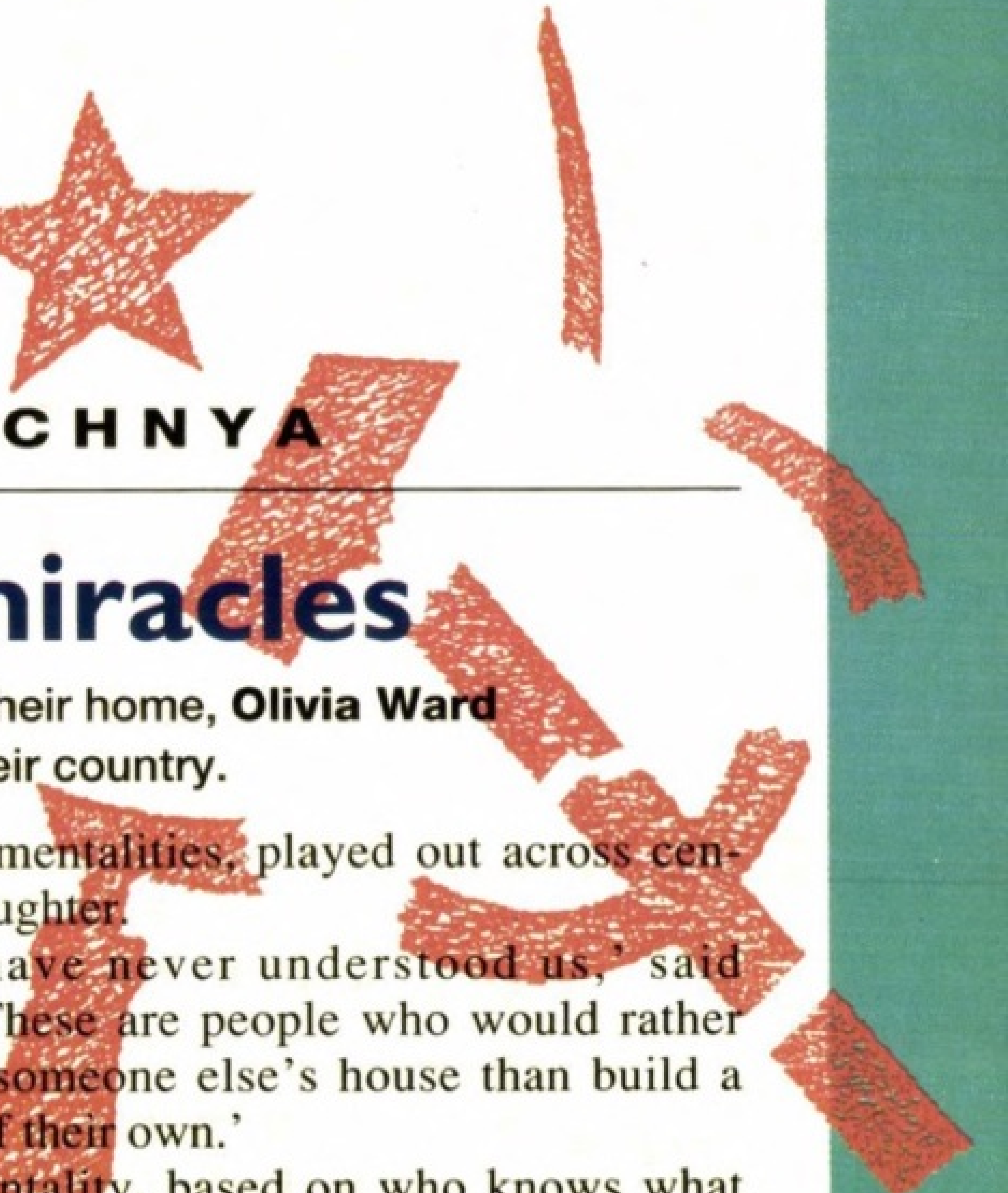
Mark Mann
Newport Pagnell, England

Fighting fund

NI readers will be aware of US Death Row prisoner Brandon Astor Jones (*Endpiece* **NI 259**). He has been granted a resentencing trial and has been appointed a legal representative chosen by the court. This person has failed adequately to represent Brandon and he is therefore seeking to appoint his own lawyer. I am setting up a fighting fund for him. Anyone interested should contact me by ringing (0)151-733-7691.

Lesley Worrall
Liverpool, England

The views expressed on the letters page are not necessarily those of the New Internationalist.

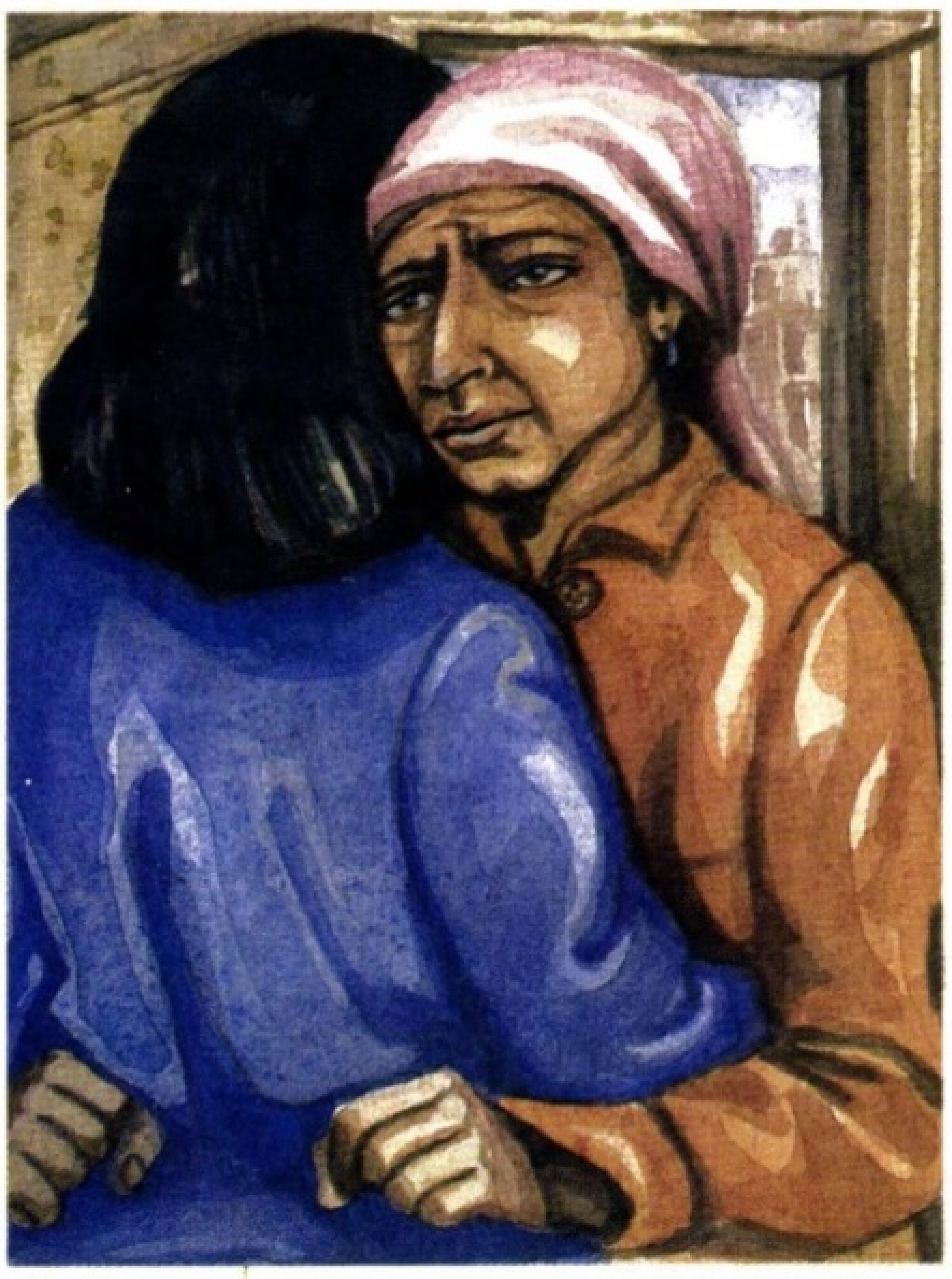


LETTER FROM **CHECHNYA**

Mountains and miracles

Returning to Chechnya with friends in search of their home, Olivia Ward understands at last why they love their country.

THE SCRIBBLED SIGN on the city gate still says: 'Welcome to Hell'. And I can read a pathetic note painted on an empty doorway in the pulverized city centre: 'Lyosha, I'm still alive. Where are you?' We drive swiftly because we don't want to look at the wreckage. It's too painful to remember that last winter of purgatory, to catch a whiff of the corpses that have merged with the sludge of scrapheaps and basements. The unidentified remains that just a year ago were the life and breath of the city.



MIRIAM McCURDY

On the eastern side of town I feel my hands clenching. My battered but stoical friends are returning for a look at what is left of their home. We have all been through the war, from the plains to the mountains. We expect the worst, and now hope is too violent to entertain.

But we find a miracle. There, surrounded by a shattered metal gate, is a neat brick house. A few late-blooming flowers sprout around the door, as though casting a fragile vote for life in the overwhelming presence of death.

The youngest children tumble out of the car, eager to find their rooms and play. But Hussein holds them back. 'There might be mines.' Gingerly he sweeps the pathway with a long-handled broom.

The house is windowless, as are most houses in Grozny after the reverberating blasts of the Russian bombs. But the bare interior is almost as it was, save for the droppings of birds. Gleefully we begin the cleaning operation. But as I throw my arms around Hedi her muscles tighten and I can sense the underlying anger she feels, the grief and futility of it all. In this house, where she spent 21 years building and polishing and raising her children, strangers have pulled apart her handiwork, her peace and her security.

Suddenly I remember my first trip to the Caucasus two years ago, and the look of anger on the face of my Russian guide when I asked who lived in the attractive single family homes flanking her dilapidated Soviet highrise.

'Them,' she said. 'Those people.'

Her cold spiteful eyes spoke volumes. The envy that Russian settlers felt when they colonized the supposedly subdued people of the Caucasus, only to find that living well was the best revenge. The sad, sometimes dangerous gap in the two mentalities, played out across centuries of slaughter.

'They have never understood us,' said Hussein. 'These are people who would rather pull down someone else's house than build a better one of their own.'

That mentality, based on who knows what sense of powerlessness and insecurity, was the opposite of a Chechen's head-on approach to life. A philosophy which at its worst led to tribal battles and banditry. At best, a sense of pride, not in towering monuments, but in the way one lived.

'A man deserves the home he has,' said Hussein. As a newcomer in the region I was struck by the welcoming human scale of the buildings. Their essential ingredients were air, space and light, more vital than the luxuries and gadgets which filled far richer places.

Used to the apologetic squalor of dingy Russian flats, I found it a revelation. In this tiny republic where great works of art had seldom sprung, a home was a life's work in progress.

I was also struck by the visceral way in which Chechens were attached to their land, not as an abstract idea but because they saw beauty in it. Sitting on a lush hillside last spring while attack helicopters rocketed the nearby village, I heard a Chechen commander ask, almost comically: 'What do you think of our place?'

And, he added, with contempt rather than hatred, wasn't it too good for a people who spoiled and polluted every inch of their own vast territory?

I wanted to argue against this sweeping generalization, seeing the faces of Russian friends, and their struggle against all those centuries-old impulses of national self-destruction.

But I could only stare at the hillside, as bees played among the apricot blossoms and rockets blasted away decades of work and care.

Later, as I lay awake on the floor of a house under siege, political arguments melted away. In the laser-pierced darkness I could feel each tremor as it was absorbed by the house itself.

In my skin and bones, I understood. ■

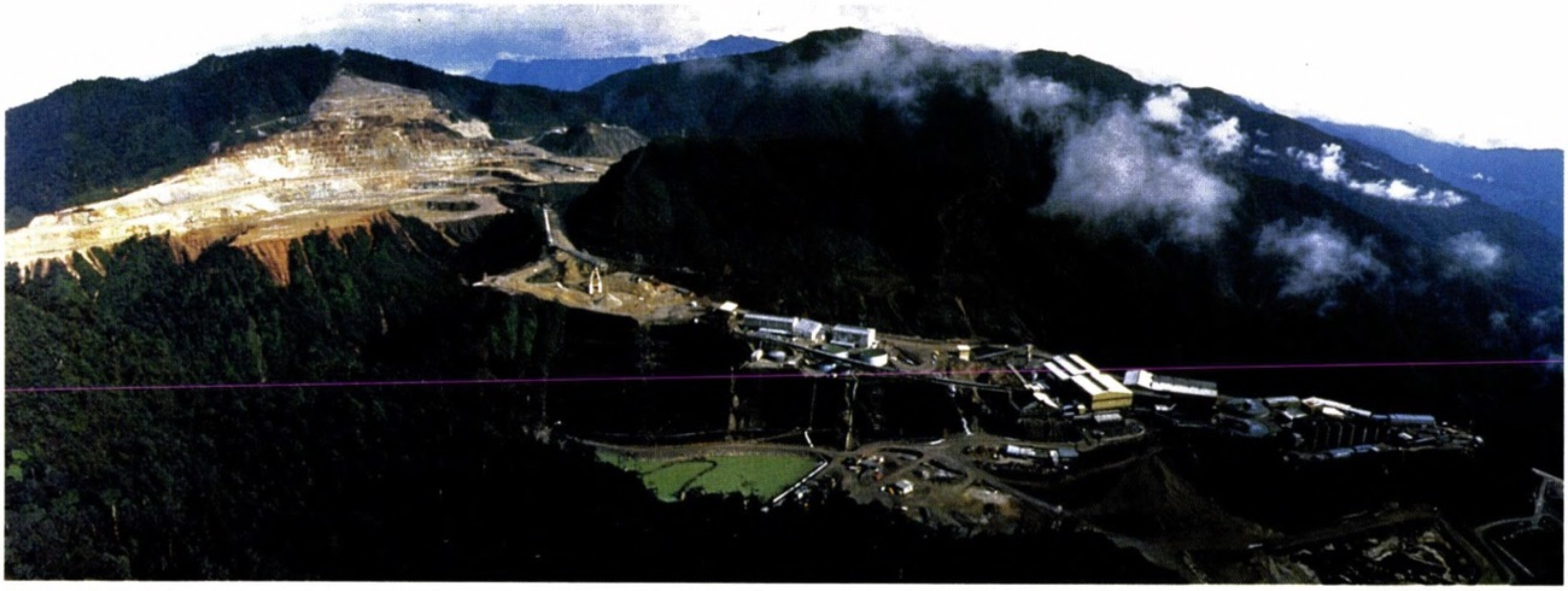
Olivia Ward is bureau chief for the *Toronto Star* in Moscow.

Update

ENVIRONMENT

Broken Hill and damaged river

Australian multinational creates mining havoc in Papua New Guinea



Not OK in Ok Tedi: the mine in Papua New Guinea which is pricking Australia's conscience.

BHP MINERALS

GOLD IN THEM thar hills and floods and muck for the people who live downstream. That's the story that's causing widespread tension in Papua New Guinea and pricking the conscience of ordinary Australians.

The mine is the Ok Tedi copper and gold mine run by Australia's biggest enterprise, the aptly named Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited (BHP), on the slopes of Mt Fubilan in the Star Mountains of PNG's Western Province. At stake are big bucks and a (rapidly changing) way of life.

Last year BHP made a record profit of US$1.21 billion with Ok Tedi contributing $282 million. For people downstream of Mt Fubilan along the Fly river, the mine's outflow of 80,000 tonnes a day of waste is destroying their traditional lifestyle. The 30,000 people who live along the banks of the Fly could drink, wash and fish from the river before the mining began in 1984. The excessive siltation is leading to increased flooding. They want a tailings dam to be built at the mine and compensation.

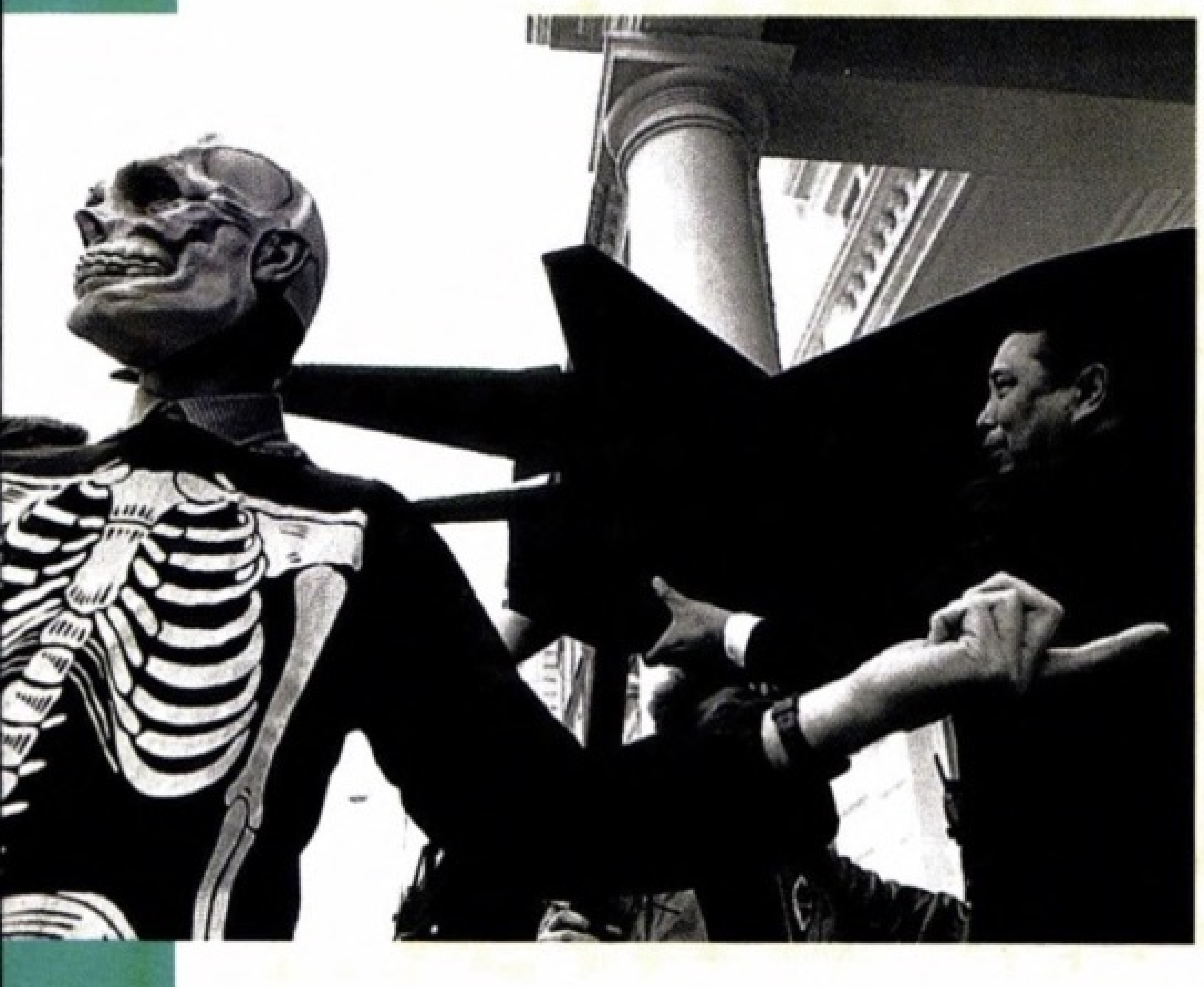
The mine is in a precarious location in a region of very high rainfall (7,900 mm or 312 inches a year). In 1984 a landslip destroyed the initial stages of a tailings dam. This was an investment worth $79.7 million and BHP has since persuaded the PNG Government to allow it to go ahead with the mine without a dam. BHP has also earned condemnation by the International Commission of Jurists for trying to influence PNG legislation which would have criminalized compensation claims by landowners against the Ok Tedi partners.

People living in the mine lease area get continuing compensation, royalties and access to education and healthcare. Those living downstream have suffered a violent change in lifestyle without such benefits.

Now legal challenges against BHP are being mounted in Australian courts. There is also the threat of violence in the region if the situation does not improve. Australians fear another Bougainville (see **NI 262**). The mining industry there, which was also run by an Australian company, became a spur to a violent revolution, and there are still sporadic outbursts of violence in the war between the people and the soldiers of PNG. Ironically the closure of that mine has made PNG very dependent economically on the Ok Tedi operation. ■

Urvi Patel

Readers wanting to support the challenges against BHP can contact: **Dr Helen Rosenbaum** at the **Australian Conservation Foundation. Tel: 61 03 9416 1166** or **Jeff Atkinson at Community Aid Abroad. Tel: 61 03 9289 9444.**



PAUL MATTSSON

Lobby against arms to Indonesia

Among unsavoury governments currently the customers of British military hardware, General (now President) Suharto's Indonesia is one of the most consistently appalling abusers of human rights. From West Papua have come reports of indiscriminate killings, torture and disappearances in order to protect the Freeport/RTZ copper and gold mine which has dispossessed tribal people of their land (see NI 268).

Then there is the perennial issue of Indonesia's illegal occupation of East Timor. Since 1975 over 200,000 people have been killed by the Indonesian military. In response to recent events in East Timor (such as September's riots), the European parliament passed a resolution calling on the international community to halt arms sales to Indonesia, echoing the NI East Timor issue (NI 253). So far the British Government has ignored this call. On 7 December the 'Stop the Hawks – No Arms to Indonesia' coalition of activist groups will be taking the case of an arms embargo to the British parliament, in a lobby organized by Campaign Against the Arms Trade. December 7 will be 20 years to the day since Indonesia invaded East Timor – *CAAT and TAPOL (Indonesia Human Rights Campaign).*

The details of the Parliamentary lobby from:
Campaign Against Arms Trade on + 44 (0)171 281 0297.

Marriage by the book

Dr Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid, an academic at Cairo University, is challenging a court order that says his writings are against Islam and forces him to separate from his wife. Abu Zeid advocates an interpretation of the Qur'an which takes into account changes in society. His ideas are considered blasphemous by more orthodox Muslims who advocate a literal reading. The judge ordered Abu Zeid to separate from Ebithal Younes, his wife, on the grounds that a heretic or non-Muslim is not allowed to marry a Muslim woman. Separation in Islam has more drastic consequences than divorce; it means that the couple can never marry again. But the two insist they are Muslims and have vowed to stay together and fight the verdict. Abu Zeid's opponents say they do not want to separate the couple but will use the decision as the first step towards preventing the professor from teaching.

Dale Gavlak, Gemini News Service

Clean 'n' slim

In just two months of this year customs officials at Tokyo's Narita airport seized some 10,000 bars of soap from travellers returning from Hong Kong and Beijing. This is no ordinary soap. It's Seaweed Defat Soap and its makers claim it washes away fat. A bar costs $2 in China, but $15 in Japan. So travellers have regularly been going over the 24 bars allowed them by the Japanese customs.

In September Japan's health ministry issued a statement questioning the soap's efficacy. Slimming is a fad that has arrived in Japan along with high fat Western food. Women of 25 weigh less than their counterparts did 20 years ago.

The Economist, vol 336 no 7932

The Athens triangle

A cloud has been lifted over Athens since summer of this year. A triangle in central Athens has been permanently closed to cars, taxis and motorbikes in an effort to slash noise and air pollution in what until then had been the noisiest and smoggiest part of the city. For years successive Greek governments, fearful of alienating car-owning voters, had dodged the issue. It took two relatively young politicians from opposing political parties to take the unprecedented step of scrapping political differences and pooling their joint environmental resolve. The area has been transformed. Shoppers and tourists can now stroll through the narrow and colourful streets of the old commercial centre in the shadow of the Acropolis without having to jump out of motorists' way every few seconds. Shopkeepers say they are happy to see people browsing in their windows unworried by parking problems and hence more willing to buy. Shoppers agree. Athens municipality has laid on a free minibus service for them. Cabbies, however, are incensed that any government has dared to ban them from anything. They have staged a few one-day strikes in protest.

John Carr, Gemini News Service

ACTIVISM

Eliminating poverty

A Bangladeshi bank leads the way

ZED NELSON / PANOS PICTURES

Cash in hand: the Grameen Bank helps these women break out of the poverty cycle.

A BANK THAT EXISTS to eliminate poverty is a rare beast, and one that claims to do so at little or no real cost to society is rarer still. Bangladesh's Grameen Bank has been providing poor women with access to tiny amounts of credit enabling them to break out of the poverty cycle.

It started its life in the tiny village of Jobra by lending 50 taka ($1.50) to Sophia Khatoon who worked seven days a week making bamboo stools which she sold to the money-lender who provided credit to buy her raw materials. She paid the money-lender interest to the tune of 10 per cent a day – more than 3,000 per cent a year! With her loan from the Grameen Bank it took Sophia Khatoon only a few months to establish her own self-employment and increase her income five-fold. In this time she repaid her loan with interest at the bank rate.

Today the Grameen Bank employs 14,000 staff and works in more than 35,000 of the country's 68,000 villages. It lends out half a billion dollars a year in nearly four million small business loans to rural clients. Its social development and education programme reaches more than 12 million people.

Its principles are inspiring. It only lends to the poorest of the poor of the rural landless without asking for security or dictating the kind of business activity the loan could be used for. Women – 94 per cent of the Bank's clients – get priority as they are the poorest. The Bank supports the client in succeeding with their venture and takes repayments of loans at current bank rates.

It's not surprising that it enjoys unparalleled customer loyalty. On-time loan repayments exceed 98 per cent and bad debts are less than half a per cent. The bank also encourages borrowers to save at the rate of one taka (three US cents) a week. Today these savings exceed 94 million dollars.

Not only is it a bank for the people but it is also of them, being fully owned by its borrowers who elect a board of directors from amongst themselves. It usually takes between six and ten successive one-year loans and concerted efforts by the borrower and the Bank's development staff to take a client from destitution to secure self-employment with modest assets.

Since 1989 the Bank has been actively replicating its lending scheme all over the world and there are 168 such 'replications' in 44 countries. It hopes to reach out to a third of the world's poor with credit schemes for women by the year 2005.

The Grameen Bank philosophy is one of enabling poor people to lift themselves out of poverty through their own efforts, thus creating a whole new economy which would be richer for everyone. ■

Shan Ali

For further information contact the author at **fax: +61 2 457 8805, email: shan@ind.tansu.com.au or Grameen Bank Support Group, 7 Burke Place, Mount Colah NSW 2079, Australia.**

Update

DEVELOPMENT

Critical cyclists

Reclaiming the streets worldwide

Since 1992 traffic has been brought to a standstill in major towns and cities in many parts of the world on the last Friday of every month. The cause of these tailbacks is not insane road traffic control nor deteriorating road conditions, but hordes of as many as 1,500 cyclists taking to the roads en masse to reclaim the streets. They ride under the banner of Critical Mass.

ADE CURWEN

Just riding our bikes, guv: an English rally.

From its beginnings in San Francisco in 1992, under the instigation of graphic designer Chris Carlsson, Critical Mass quickly became a global phenomena. Described by participants as a 'planned coincidence', each event operates almost solely without any central organizing body or steering committee. Chris Eardley, an engineer from South London and one of the people responsible for bringing Critical Mass to the city explains: 'One or two people do the publicity, and that's about all the publicity there is. Everyone turns up and it goes from there. People make a route or do what they like.'

The idea arose out of concerns about road safety amongst San Francisco's cyclists. Vikter Veezee, a veteran of both the San Francisco and London Critical Masses, remembers: 'It was just Chris Carlsson basically going "gee, we should ride together in some kind of safety-in-numbers concept". And also with the idea that there's a lot of people who get off work at 5.30pm or so in downtown San Francisco. Certainly quite a few of them are bicycling home in the same direction and if you got them all together, it would be safe, it would be fun, it would be community forming.' After much leafleting they managed to get around five hundred people to attend the first one in early 1992. By the summer of 1993 they had nearly two thousand.

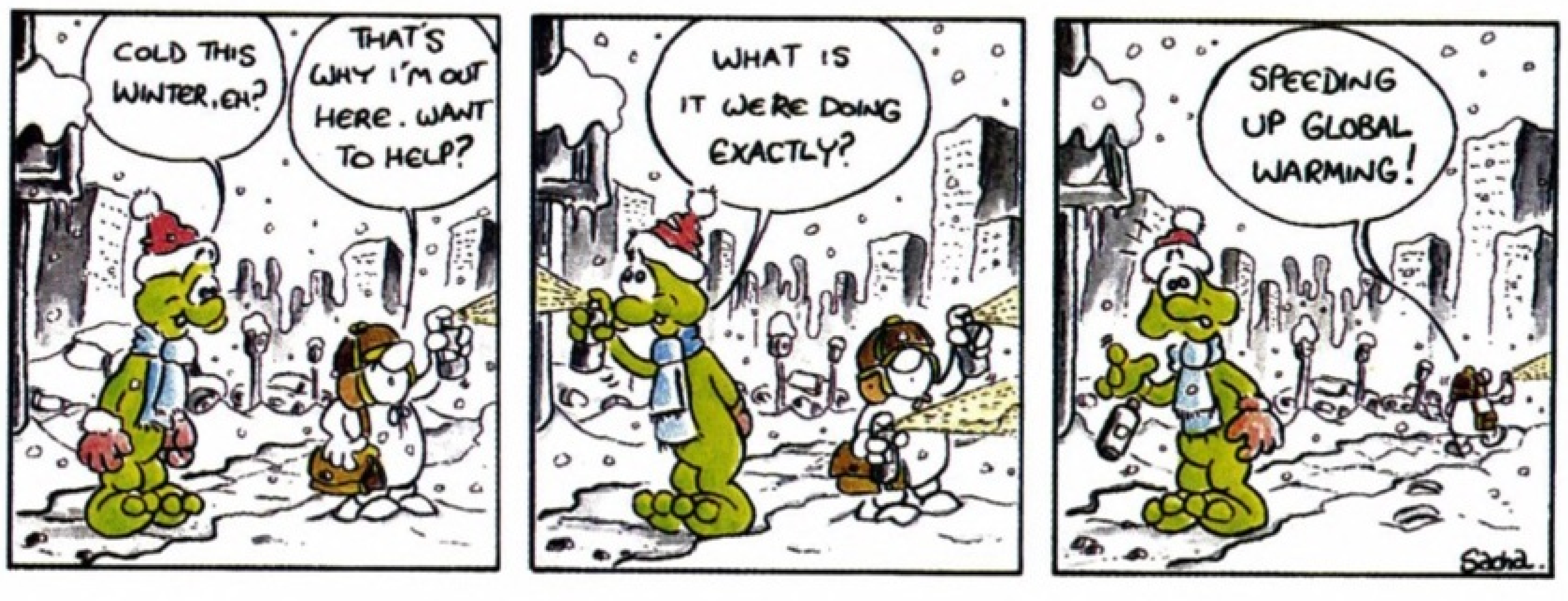
By April 1994 mass rides were occurring all over Europe, including regular ones in London, Berlin, Barcelona and Poznan. Now they happen on every continent – except Antartica.

The core belief that unites the participants, who are of all ages and from varied backgrounds, is that bicycles are a superior form of urban transport. They don't cause pollution or fatal accidents, they don't block up the road with traffic (except during a Critical Mass rally), they are easy to park and store and their use benefits health. Yet cars still get almost all existing road space, road building programmes and tax breaks via schemes like the company car and special government attention.

Perhaps the ultimate aim of the rallies is best summed up by Chris Eardley. 'The Government has this big problem about how does it deal with transport chaos in towns. Cyclists know the answer; they use the answer everyday. You just get the feeling you need to shout at people all the time, "This is the answer, I am riding it."' ■

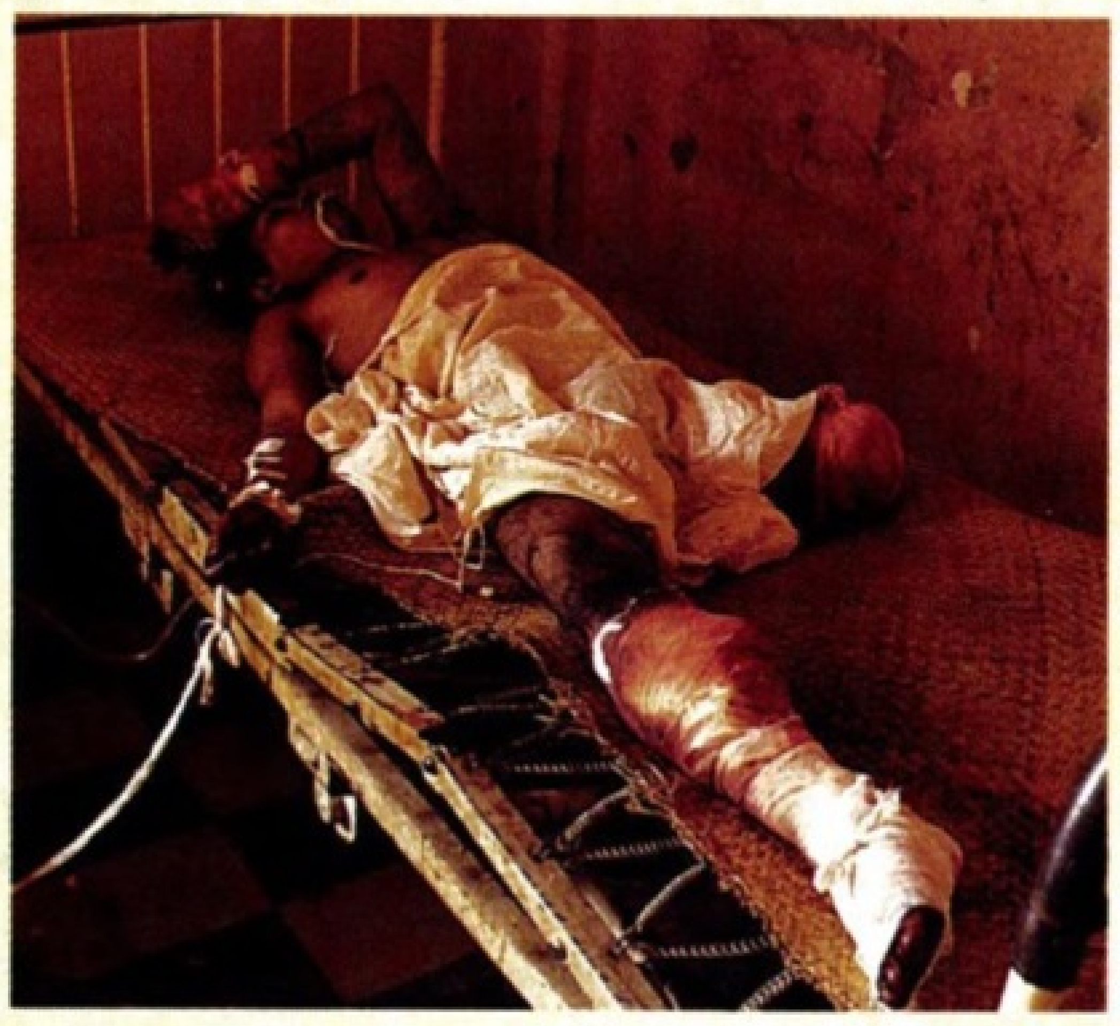
Jaspre Bark

Chlorophyll by Sacha


COLD THIS WINTER, EH?
THAT'S WHY I'M OUT HERE. WANT TO HELP?
WHAT IS IT WE'RE DOING EXACTLY?
SPEEDING UP GLOBAL WARMING!
Sacha

Action Cambodia

This photograph, published in the April 1993 edition of the NI on Cambodia was deemed by the British police to be in contravention of the Public Order Act 1984. Some 30 people carrying the photo as a placard gathered


NIC DUNLOP / PANOS PICTURES

to protest at the British Government's continued resistance to the implementation of a total ban on landmines. Inspector Bhangoo of Charing Cross police station told them that a public order offence would be committed unless the picture was removed.

Harry Cohen, a British Member of Parliament said: 'The whole point of the picture is that it shows a shocking situation. This demonstration is intended to underline the need to ban these horrendous weapons in order to stop scenes like that depicted in the picture being continually repeated across the world.'

Paul Donovan

For further information contact:
Action Cambodia, 41 Westbury Court,
Nightingale Lane, London SW4 9AB, England.

Right livelihood

We are delighted that one of the winners of the 1995 Right Livelihood Award (often referred to as 'the Alternative Nobel Prize') is NI contributor Carmel Budiardjo, who has campaigned over 20 years for Indonesian political prisoners and the people of East Timor. The Jury honoured her for 'holding the Indonesian Government accountable for its actions and upholding the universality of fundamental human rights'.

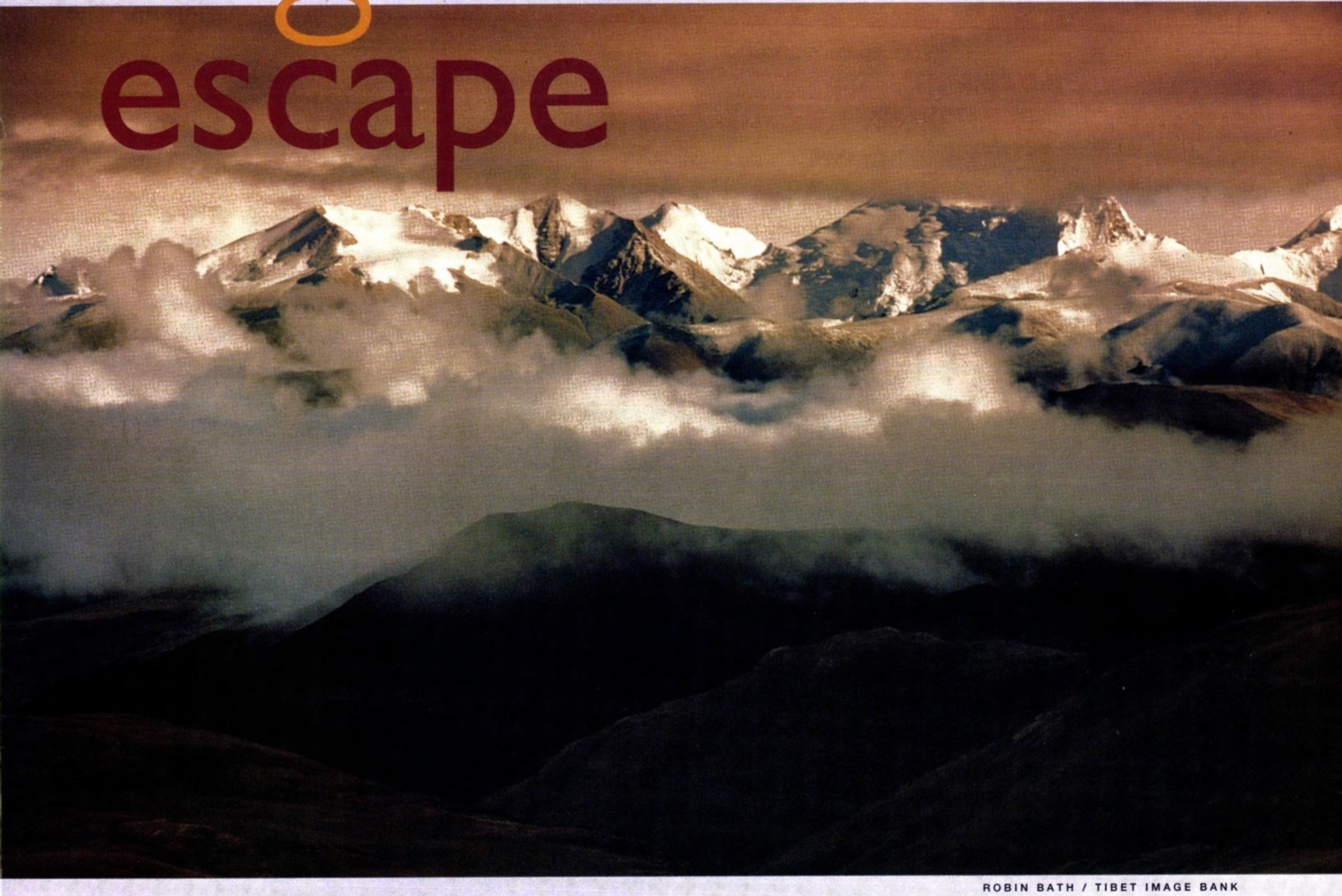
Among the three other winners of this year's prize are the Serb Civic Council of Bosnia, a body which has resolutely refused to succumb to ethnic hatred and works by political means for a peace in Bosnia which would protect human rights and parliamentary democracy. The Council has about 50,000 members, which is a third of all Bosnian Serbs living in areas still controlled by the Bosnian Government.

Quote

'Peace is such a delicate matter it should not be left in the hands of pacifists.'

Charles Krettien, French Ambassador to Guatemala, to a Greenpeace demonstration on the steps of his embassy.

The great escape



ROBIN BATH / TIBET IMAGE BANK

What on earth is inducing ordinary Tibetans to cross – on foot and at night – the highest, bleakest, most perilous mountain paths in the world ? **Vanessa Baird** begins her investigations in Nepal.

IT'S MONSOON TIME in Kathmandu. Heat and torrential rain alternate, mud and dust just compete. I'm heading for Ichango village. So, over the years, have many thousands of refugees who have escaped Tibet since the Chinese invaded their country in 1950. They approach it from a different direction and in a rather different way though – over the highest mountain range in the world.

At Ichango is the Tibetan Refugee Reception Centre, a collection of ramshackle buildings which have sprung up in the midst of the brilliant green paddyfields that lie between the city and the mountains. I have just heard that 31 escapees from Tibet arrived the previous day.

For six weeks they trekked across the mountains, moving by night to avoid detection. They arrived exhausted, wet, hungry, dirty, with swollen feet and covered in insect bites. To add to their misery they had been beaten and robbed by Nepalese border guards – an increasingly common occurrence.

I'm sitting in the clinic with Sonam, a Tibetan nurse who looks after 'new arrivals'. Four small boys – aged six to eleven – suddenly appear. Sonam gives them a pair of nail-clippers and they set about attending to each other's toes.

'Are these refugees?'

'Yes.'

'Did they come with their parents?'

'Oh no, their parents sent them off by themselves.'

I hadn't expected this. How can presumably loving parents send their tiny children alone on such a perilous journey?

'It's quite common,' says Sonam. 'I

had a four-month-old baby arrive last year. The mother just gave him to the guide and asked him to take him to the Dalai Lama. The parents think they are doing the best thing for their children, for their future.'

I start to interview the boys, one by one. 'Six,' replies Wangdu to my second question. He's a skinny, fidgety, big-eyed, mousey little fellow, with a heart-wrenchingly small husky voice.

How was the journey? 'It was difficult,' he replies. 'There was so little food. Sometimes we didn't get any for two days. And it was difficult trying to keep up with the others.' It is not uncommon for guides to abandon 'stragglers'.

Once over the border she was arrested, beaten and stripped by Nepalese guards, who took all her money

Wangdu comes from a fairly poor background. His mother washes dishes in a restaurant in Lhasa, his father is unemployed. Wangdu goes to school but it is a Chinese school, he says, and the Chinese teacher ignores the Tibetan pupils. That is why his parents have decided that the best thing for him is to come over to India.

Wangdu's situation is typical. The other boys have also come 'for their education'.

The journey sounds hair-raising. For seven-year-old Tsering the worst thing was when he nearly fell off the mountainside while they were walking at night. I ask the eldest boy, who like the nurse is called Sonam (Tibetan names are not gender specific), how it felt to get over the border into Nepal at last. He says he felt nothing. 'The guide had lied to us so many times before, saying we were nearly in Nepal, that I just thought he was lying again.'

Sonam, who seems to look after the younger boys, is the only one who allows himself to shed a few tears as he is talking. Only when a nurse is bandaging little Wangdu's wound – sustained during a police beating – does he look as if he might cry but he quickly stops himself. It makes me wonder what psychological damage has been done in the past six weeks.

The nurse and I cross the fields and make our way to the dormitory to find some of the other refugees. On the way we meet a group of them who are heading for the nearest *stupa* – a Buddhist dome-shaped structure with a peaked top. One of them – a nun – has been badly beaten by border guards. But they seem otherwise to be relaxed and in good spirits.

We arrive at the dormitory, a simple barrack-like building, quite inadequate for the needs of all the refugees who turn up here. They stay for about a week, during which time they are interviewed by officials from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and are given food, clothing and medical treatment. Many arrive suffering from frostbite, and have to have toes amputated. They are then bussed off to the northern Indian town of Dharamsala, home of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile. Conditions in the camp may be spartan, but compared with nights near Everest it probably feels like a five-star hotel.

None of the new arrivals are overtly political refugees. Most have left to pursue their education – this often means their Buddhist education and so it counts for asylum purposes as an escape from religious oppression.

We find 17-year-old Khatup Tso sitting smiling on the grass with her 14-year-old friend. They are wearing clean clothes – the yak skins and other heavy garments that protected them on the journey are lying drying on the grass nearby.

It doesn't take long to realize that Khatup Tso is a very determined young woman. This is her second attempt to get out of Tibet. Her first ended in failure a few months ago, when she was sent back and had a spell in a Lhasa prison. Once released she worked, saved and tried again. She comes not from Lhasa but from the Eastern province of Amdo. Why is she so determined to leave Tibet?

'Because I want to learn English.'

'Why?'

'Because once I learn English I can go back to Tibet and I can do anything.'

'Where did you get this idea from? Do you know anyone who has done this?'

'No. I don't know anyone. It's my idea.'

'And what does your family say?'

'They say, "Go and study well".'

I'm thinking there might be easier ways of getting English lessons. I am also wondering if this meets the conditions for seeking asylum. But this girl's decision is indicative of at least one of the forms of oppression Tibetans are experiencing in their own country.

One of the most common complaints is that there are no opportunities for Tibetans in their country. Education and employment are tilted in favour of Chinese migrants – now reckoned to outnumber Tibetans.

I wonder what is going to happen when Khatup realizes that things are not as she thinks, that life is not hunky dory for Tibetans in exile; and that knowing English may not be the key that opens all those closed doors when she gets back. Then I think of the setbacks she has already experienced and how she has coped with them. I fancy her drive and energy may change direction, but it's not going to go up in a puff of despair.

'Tibetans are very determined people,' comments Sonam.

A couple days later I make a return trip to the camp and find more of the refugees washing their clothes and relaxing. This time my interpreter is Tashi, a former Tibetan resistance fighter who now co-runs the Potala Tourist Home in Kathmandu. He's a warm man with a big smile and a wicked sense of humour.

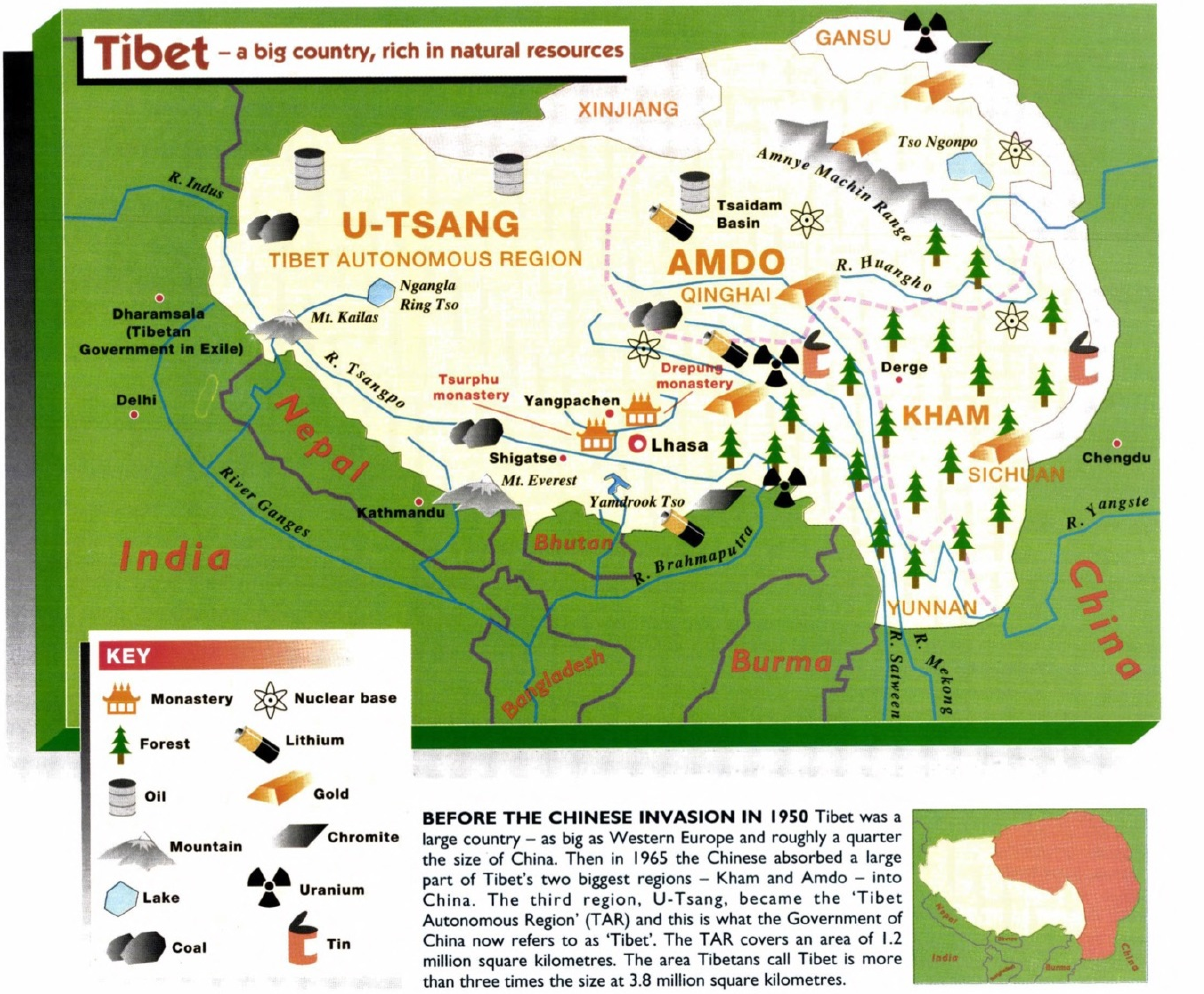
Lying under a tree is Rinchen Dolma. From a distance she looks like a daydreaming teenager, elbows on the grass, her chin cupped in her hands.

She sits up to greet us as we get nearer. I realize that in fact she is an elderly woman and the lines of her face tell a story that is hardly the stuff of daydreams.

Born into a fairly well-to-do rural family 60 years ago, she became an obvious target of Chinese Communist 're-education'. She was sent to various labour camps for a total of 20 years, and was eventually

Clipped toe-nails and a safe haven for Dawa (8), Sonam (11), Wangdu (6) and Tsering (7).

VANESSA BAIRD


Tibet – a big country, rich in natural resources
GANSU
XINJIANG
Tso Ngonpo
Amnye Machin Range
R. Indus
U-TSANG
TIBET AUTONOMOUS REGION
Tsaidam Basin
AMDO
QINGHAI
R. Huangho
Ngangla Ring Tso
Mt. Kailas
Dharamsala (Tibetan Government in Exile)
R. Tsangpo
Tsurphu monastery
Drepung monastery
Yangpachen
Derge
KHAM
Delhi
Nepal
Lhasa
Shigatse
Mt. Everest
Yamdrook Tso
SICHUAN
Chengdu
River Ganges
Kathmandu
Bhutan
R. Brahmaputra
R. Yangste
India
China
YUNNAN
Bangladesh
Burma
R. Satween
R. Mekong
KEY
Monastery
Nuclear base
Forest
Lithium
Oil
Gold
Mountain
Chromite
Lake
Uranium
Coal
Tin
Nepal
Bhutan
India
Bangladesh
Burma
China

BEFORE THE CHINESE INVASION IN 1950 Tibet was a large country – as big as Western Europe and roughly a quarter the size of China. Then in 1965 the Chinese absorbed a large part of Tibet's two biggest regions – Kham and Amdo – into China. The third region, U-Tsang, became the 'Tibet Autonomous Region' (TAR) and this is what the Government of China now refers to as 'Tibet'. The TAR covers an area of 1.2 million square kilometres. The area Tibetans call Tibet is more than three times the size at 3.8 million square kilometres.

released 10 years ago. Her parents died in Chinese jails. Both in the labour camps and in her village the Chinese authorities vilified her as a 'class enemy'.

After her release she was not allowed to leave her village, but was eventually granted a visa to go on a pilgrimage to Mount Kailas, one of Tibet's holy mountains. As this mountain is not far from the border with Nepal she – together with her husband and son – took the opportunity to join a group of escapees. Once over the border she was arrested, beaten and stripped by Nepalese guards, who took all her money. She finally arrived here five days ago, having walked through 25 nights.

She tells her story without anger or bitterness. But she is very certain of one thing: she doesn't want to go back to Tibet. 'I don't want to die under the Chinese.' To a Buddhist this is more than just a turn of phrase. The conditions under which you die can affect your reincarnation.

We leave them there, crossing the sweet-smelling basmati ricefields. This place feels like a welcome haven, a pause for the refugees before the long bus ride to Dharamsala, where they will get a blessing from the Dalai Lama. 'That will make everything all right,' says 17-year-old Khatup.

These refugees are the lucky ones. No-one knows how many are being turned back at the border – some even get as far as the immigration centre at Kathmandu before being turned back.

This is not meant to happen. Since April this year border guards – and sometimes the police – have been sending back refugees or physically handing them over to the Chinese in exchange for 'gifts'. This goes against Nepalese Government policy – and its understanding with UNHCR, according to whom 227 refugees were deported in the first half of this year. These are only the reported ones: the real figure is likely to be much higher.

I talk with Tashi Namjyal, the Tibetan Government-in-Exile's representative in Nepal. He's particularly worried about two former political prisoners who were sent back. Both were imprisoned for their part in the 1987 demonstrations in Lhasa – one is a 70-year-old tailor called Tsewang and the other is Thuptren Tsering, a 63-year-old monk from Sera monastery who was also imprisoned between 1959 and 1979.

There is mounting pressure on the Nepalese Government – especially from the US and the Netherlands – to control its border guards. But Nepal is also under pressure from China, not just a powerful neighbour but a major investor and donor of aid.

The UNHCR is offering practical help to Nepal, including training for border officials on how to treat refugees. Listening to the refugees' stories it sounds as if they could do with it.

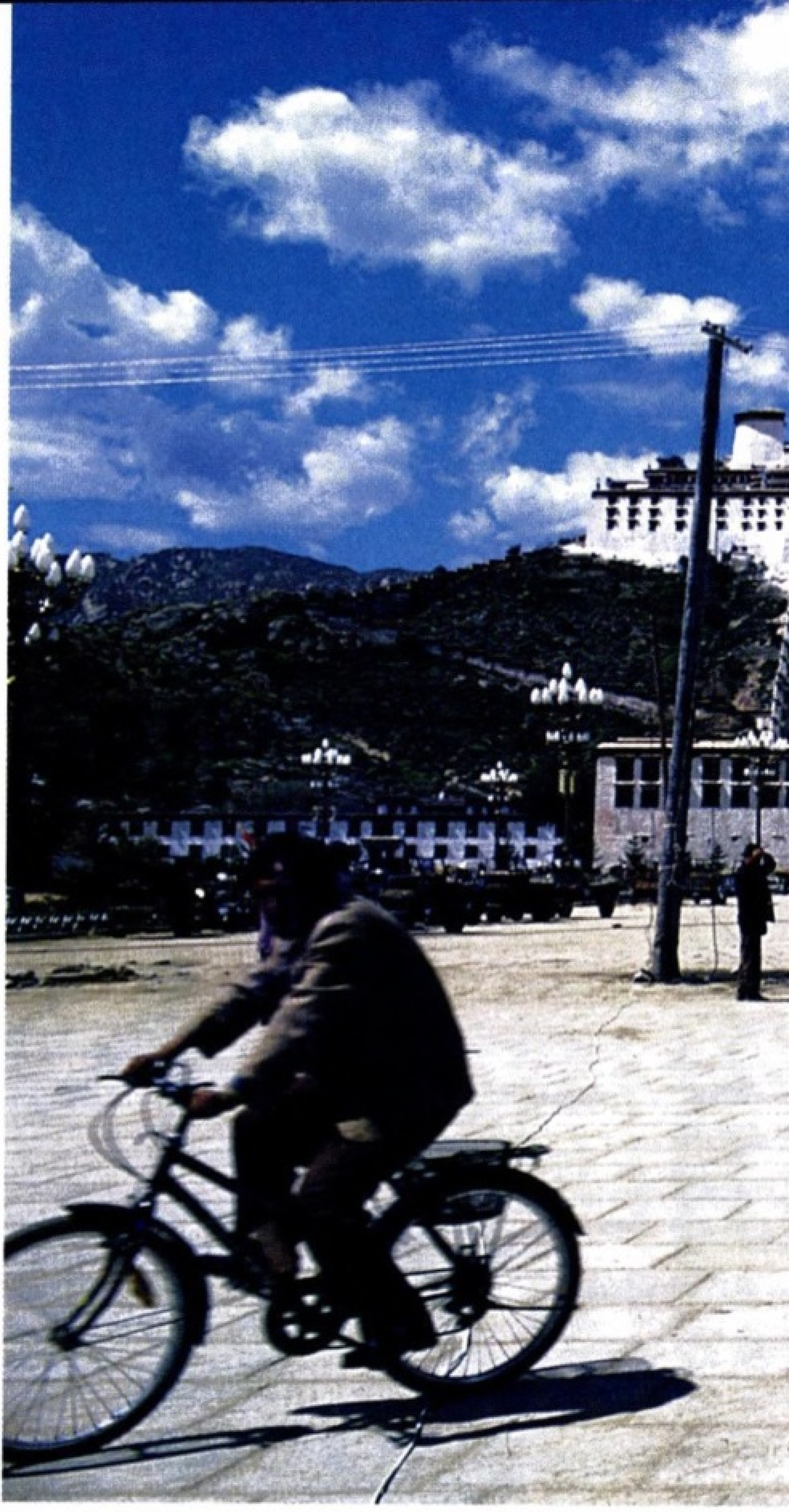
Leaving the camp I wonder whether I shall see any of these refugees in Dharamsala, at the end of my own journey. What will have happened to them?

'They don't begin to realize the difficulties of exile,' Tashi sighs. 'But they are enjoying their first taste of freedom now. I don't want to spoil it for them.' ■

Adventures with Tintin

Are we psychotic? Are we carrying 'biologicals'...?

Arrival in the 'forbidden city' of Lhasa.



Is *Tintin* OK? Packing for Tibet is no simple matter. Can't have anything with a picture of the Dalai Lama in it for a start. I'm halfway through Catriona Bass's excellent *Inside the Treasure House* but that's too risky to take. While the mammoth *Tibetan Handbook* by Victor Chan might seem a bit too keen for the casual tourist I'm supposed to be. China allows into Tibet only two or three Western journalists it can trust a year and likes to keep them on a tight rein. I wrote 'English teacher' on my visa application.

All foreigners are suspect. 'Expect to be searched and have your hotel room bugged,' I have been warned. So I'm being extra careful. No tape-recorder. Notebook restricted to one. Just a few rolls of film. A couple of popular guidebooks. And of course *Tintin in Tibet*.

In the mid-1980s China was trying to boost tourism in Tibet and published a target of half-a-million tourists a year. Now tourism is down to a trickle and the country is officially open only to travel groups organized by an approved tour operator. I am part of a tourist group. The fact that the group consists of two of us, my partner Chris and me, is proof of the ingenuity of some Nepalese travel agents.

We try to blend in to one of the large groups of tourists. These are the visitors the Chinese authorities like. They pay a lot for their holidays, they move in a very visible and controllable form, and they are everywhere accompanied by an approved guide who is often their sole source of information on (and thus their insulation from) the realities of Tibet.

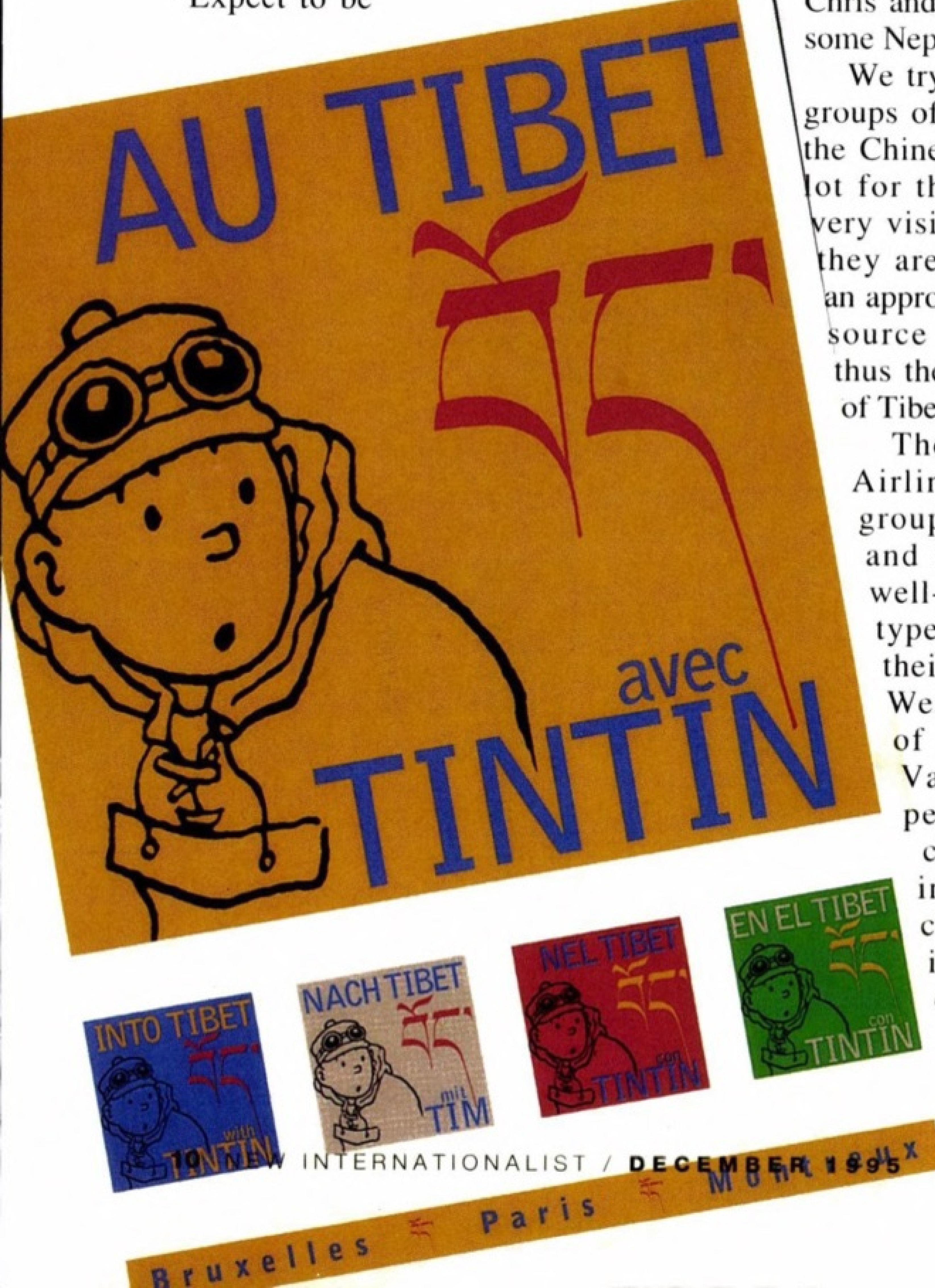
The Chinese South Western Airlines plane is filled by three groups – one French, one Spanish and one Italian. The French are well-heeled, middle-aged, trekking types. They have paid $3,000 for their holiday (excluding airfares). We take off, climbing quickly out of the treacherous Kathmandu Valley. As we pass Everest, its peak soaring way above the clouds, I think of the refugees I interviewed in Kathmandu, clambering across these incredible mountains with only roasted barley flour (*tsampa*) to nourish them.

The green of the Nepalese countryside has given way to the arid brown of Tibet. But it's not just brown. It's a subtle rainbow of gold, mauve, orange, blue and the odd little strip of green in the valleys. It's an awesome, uncompromising landscape, whose character has helped Tibetans keep out unwanted visitors. That was up to the time of the Chinese invasion – or 'liberation' as the Chinese say – in 1950.

Suspicion of foreigners has taken a new turn in Tibet, I think, as we fill in our embarkation forms for the Chinese authorities. It kicks off by asking us whether we suffer from: 'Psychosis, leprosy, AIDS, active pulmonary disease, TB, fever, cough.' It gets more puzzling when the line of inquiry shifts to whether the visitor is carrying 'blood products', 'biologicals' or 'second-hand clothes'. Should I declare the jeans I'm wearing – bought second-hand from an Oxfam shop?

About 50 uniformed officials watch us disembark at Gongkar airport. Interspersed are equally official-looking men, wearing what I take to be a standard spy's uniform of plain clothes, regulation sunglasses and nylon made-in-China imitation straw hats. A Tibetan driver is there to meet us and we start the 90-kilometre, three-hour journey to Lhasa.

The high mountain air is clear and sharp as a knife, the light white and almost painfully bright. We cross the Yarlung Tsangpo River which flows across the high Tibetan plateau before looping south to enter Bangladesh. In the middle of the bridge stands a lone Chinese soldier, looking bored out of his skull. He cuts a rather sad figure, and looks quite literally out of place. For Chinese soldiers and officials



POSTCARD FROM TIBET EXHIBITION FUNDED BY THE HERGE FOUNDATION, BELGIUM

China's pride, Lhasa's loss. Tibetan houses have been razed to make way for a Tiananmen-style square in front of the Potala Palace, once home to the Dalai Lama.

TIM NUNN

being posted in Tibet is a bit like being sent to Siberia. In their eyes it's a backward, unhealthy place with little oxygen.

Occasionally a two-storey turreted Tibetan farm compound appears in the landscape, looking like a miniature walled city. Strung across the turrets are brightly coloured Buddhist prayer flags which will remain until all their colour has faded – an indication that the prayers have all been picked up and carried off by the wind 'horses'.

Our driver stops for a smoke and a pee and a group of half-a-dozen children of various shapes and sizes comes up to us, their shyness visibly competing with their curiosity. Curiosity wins out and a big lad of about 10 or 11 says softly: 'Dalai Lama?'

We softly say back: 'Dalai Lama,' and they smile. It seems to be a code for many things, including: 'Are you with us or against us?' The Chinese made a serious miscalculation when they decided to boost tourism in the 1980s. They never anticipated the degree of sympathy Western tourists would have for Tibetans, their culture and their struggle for independence. Foreigners not only sympathized; many helped by smuggling into Tibet tapes of talks by the Dalai Lama and taking out information about human-rights abuses.

We approach Lhasa on a wide, open road, dynamited right through the natural wall of mountain and built for military trucks. It feels like a strange way to enter this particular city which for hundreds of years has been the archetypal romantic, forbidden city, perched 3,600 metres high on the roof of the world, the tantalizing dream of travellers, missionaries and explorers.

The Potala Palace comes into view, perched on its hilltop high above all other buildings. I try to relate what I see now with old photos of Lhasa I have seen. It's not easy. The demolition of Tibetan buildings has accelerated so dramatically in the past three years that today only about two per cent of the city is still Tibetan in style. What has taken its place is low, uninspiring concrete-and-glass blocks, ill-suited both aesthetically and to Tibet's climate.

We pass quickly though the city centre and get to the Chinese state-owned Sunlight Hotel. As part of our 'tour' we are obliged to spend two nights in this 'luxury' hotel. Whatever the intention behind the big 'Welcome' sign in English as you go into the foyer, the spirit is absent. Our questions to the staff in reception are met with a turning of the head – in the opposite direction – or a blank stare. Am I being paranoid? Are the staff under orders not to co-operate with individual travellers who have slipped the 'guided tour' net? Or are they always like this?

Suddenly I remember Tashi, our Tibetan interpreter in Kathmandu, giving a valedictory piece of advice. 'When you go to Tibet don't go with negative feelings towards the Chinese. Go with an open mind and a pure heart.' He's right of course. But what if state control and surveillance makes it impossible to talk to anyone, whether Chinese or Tibetan?

I recall Catriona Bass's book set in Tibet in the mid-1980s where she describes friendships and conversations with both Chinese and Tibetans. And I recall her grim epilogue in which she describes what has happened to some of the Tibetan friends she so vividly evoked in her narrative – killed, tortured or imprisoned now.

Of course none of this is obvious to the sightseer at the Potala Palace, former residence of the Dalai Lama. Here scores of camera-clicking Chinese can be seen apparently enjoying Tibet's cultural heritage. The authorities have spent hundreds of thousands of *yuan* restoring the amazing 1,000-room, 13-storey building. There are large signs to that effect. The fact that the restoration makes Tibetophiles turn roughly the same hue as the bilious green paint the Chinese are using is another matter. The message we are supposed to receive is that the Chinese have changed, they do care and are trying.

At the foot of the Potala a vast Tiananmen-style square, complete with grandiose chandelier lamps, is in the final stages of being built. Tibetan houses have been demolished for the project. In the middle is a Chinese military aircraft. With its back to the Potala a large stand for the Tibet Autonomous Region Anniversary celebrations which are due soon is being built by Tibetan workers.

A Tibetan woman stops in front of the scaffolding and prays through it to the Potala crowning the hill high above. As the residence of the god-king Dalai Lama the Potala was one the great sacred places of Lhasa. Today its *raison d'être* is absent and in exile. Only in the hopes and dreams of people like this woman does the Potala retain its meaning.

The Chinese never anticipated the degree of sympathy foreign tourists would have with Tibetans

Meanwhile a group of Germans are negotiating with cycle-rickshaw drivers to take them to the Barkhor – the old heart of Lhasa. The rickshaw drivers will wait for them while they have a quick look around and then drive them back to the Holiday Inn.

Do these tourists, I wonder, have any inkling of what has been happening in the Barkhor in recent times?

Do they know that this is the bloody centre-stage for Tibet's independence struggle and the place where China makes palpable its iron fist? ■

NORMA JOSEPH / TIBET IMAGE BANK

Shadows videos and mobile phones

To the Barkhor – repressed heart of Lhasa where unarmed protesters face bullets and batons.

An old Tibetan woman walks towards us turning a prayer wheel. It's an ordinary scene but suddenly it strikes me as a very assertive thing to do. For 45 years this country has been occupied by a foreign government which has tried to stamp out its 'primitive' culture and religion. But here she is, dressed in her traditional woollen cloth *chupa*. Meanwhile the Chinese cycle around her: with their sunglasses, summer hats and crisp clothes they look every bit the new consumers of modern China.

In 1992, following Deng Xiaoping's exhortation to China to accelerate economic development, the Chinese authorities in Tibet leapt on the bandwagon of economic reform. Traders, pedlars and itinerant workers started moving into Tibet, many escaping growing rural poverty and unemployment in China's western and central provinces. Today the result is obvious: Lhasa is teeming with private Chinese shops and restaurants. A lot of money is to be made catering for the hundreds of thousands of Chinese cadres and military personnel. Incentives to Chinese immigrants include altitude allowance, remoteness bonus, tax concessions, shorter hours and longer holidays.

There are now 150,000 people living in Lhasa of whom two-thirds are reckoned to be Chinese. But we're now in the centre, which is supposed to be still mainly Tibetan. Where are they all? There are small clusters of Tibetans, but it's hardly one in three. I ask a family of prayer-wheeling women for directions to the Barkhor and they eagerly point the way down a side-alley.

Suddenly we are in a warren of little alleys, running between old stone Tibetan houses with painted window frames and pots of flowers. We have stumbled into a small remaining enclave of the old Tibetan Lhasa – it's run-down but real and heart-warming.

The Chinese do not venture here – and it's another world. Tibetans greet us with amused expressions and 'Tashi delek' – a sort of all-purpose phrase which originated as a New Year greeting. A young nun asks if we have a picture of the Dalai Lama. Sorry, no. Tibetans have been picked up and interrogated after such transactions. There have also been cases of tourists being deliberately set up. The nun is disappointed but philosophical about it, and goes smiling on her way. I only hope her open trusting nature does not get her into trouble. Increasingly, young nuns are becoming targets of the security forces.

We pass some people playing pool on outdoor tables and stumble upon the Barkhor Square at the top of which is the Jokhang Temple. Six-foot tall conical incense-burners billow magical clouds, the smell of juniper filling the air. Pilgrims – who come from all over Tibet – prostrate themselves in front of the Temple, its golden tops glinting in the sun. The sound of chanting is softly hypnotic.

Used as a Chinese army barracks and pigsty during the Cultural Revolution, the Jokhang has now been restored to something of its former glory. Around the temple is a narrow road called the Barkhor Circuit, around which worshippers go in a clockwise direction. This circumambulation is called *khorra* – the more rounds you do the more merit you accumulate. This merit helps overcome sins committed in this and past lives with the hope of achieving a better rebirth and salvation for future lives.

But the Barkhor Circuit is also the main Tibetan market in Lhasa, and the busiest place in the city. Here the sacred rituals of circumambulation and prostration mesh easily – even invisibly – with the profane rituals of shopping and gossiping. It's not surprising, says my partner: Buddhism is, she says, very 'down to earth' in all sorts of unexpected ways.

Since 1987 the Barkhor has had another role – as the stage for political protests against the Chinese occupation of Tibet. These have started off as small-scale peaceful demonstrations, involving a handful of monks or nuns chanting independence slogans and waving Tibetan flags. To the Chinese authorities these have been deeply threatening affairs requiring an immediate response: soldiers and police have swooped in to arrest, beat and sometimes kill protesters.

The most bloody incidents happened between 1987 and 1989 when, emboldened by the international coverage the Dalai Lama was receiving on a visit to the US, Tibetans took to the streets. On Chinese National Day, 1 October 1987, for example, about 80 people started chanting slogans. The Chinese security forces responded violently, beating and arresting protesters. Soon more than 2,000 Tibetans had gathered outside the local police station demanding the protesters' release. Women and children started throwing stones at police. The police station and its vehicles were set on fire. The police responded by firing into the crowd, killing and injuring an unknown number of Tibetans.

There were numerous other protests in the months that followed. Then on 5 March 1988 a full-scale riot involving 2,000 Tibetans shook the heart of Lhasa. The security forces responded with bullets and tear-gas. Monks retreated to the Jokhang Temple which soldiers then stormed. Around 16 Tibetans were killed, some shot, some beaten to death with iron bars and some thrown off the roof of the Jokhang. Official Chinese reports put the death toll at one: that of a Chinese soldier. Around 800 people were arrested. For the first time angry Tibetans targeted Chinese businesses in the Barkhor area – a pharmacy and a restaurant were burned down.

The protests continued through 1988, provoking an increasingly tough Chinese reaction until martial law was imposed in March 1989. Martial law was lifted again on 1 May 1990 but you would never know it in the Barkhor today. Video cameras are permanently positioned on the rooftops while in the Square there are security guards every few yards, especially around the entrances. A helicopter circles close overhead. You can feel the weight of scrutiny – not only from the uniformed but also the uninformed. In the Barkhor you acquire a 'shadow' – or several shadows – within minutes. At first it's a bit paranoia-inducing but after a while it's just part of being in Lhasa, and spotting informers becomes a pastime. Is that one there – the Tibetan with the Chinese-looking jacket and shiny shoes? But then clothes are not necessarily an indicator – I read in one report that Tibetan beggars had been recruited as spies and one was seen begging one moment and the next using a mobile phone to inform police of what was going on in the Square.

> *The Chinese policy now seems to be to arrest, interrogate, torture, release, then re-arrest.*

For Tibetan protesters the implications are of course more serious. Political protests are still happening on a pretty regular basis. But they are small-scale these days – and short-lived. Two or three monks or nuns will march shouting 'Free Tibet' for a few minutes before security guards or plainclothes police pounce on them. Now many Tibetans resort to writing things on scraps of paper and throwing them down for others to read as they are circumambulating. An underground newspaper called

Monks run into a burning police station to rescue prisoners during 1987 demonstrations. Nowadays security forces squash any sign of protest within minutes.

JOHN ACKERLY / TIBET IMAGE BANK

Uprising is being printed – until, presumably, the Chinese find out from where.

The Chinese policy now seems to be to arrest, interrogate, torture, release, then re-arrest. Those released cannot speak openly of what has happened to them because the authorities will know they have talked and re-arrest them.

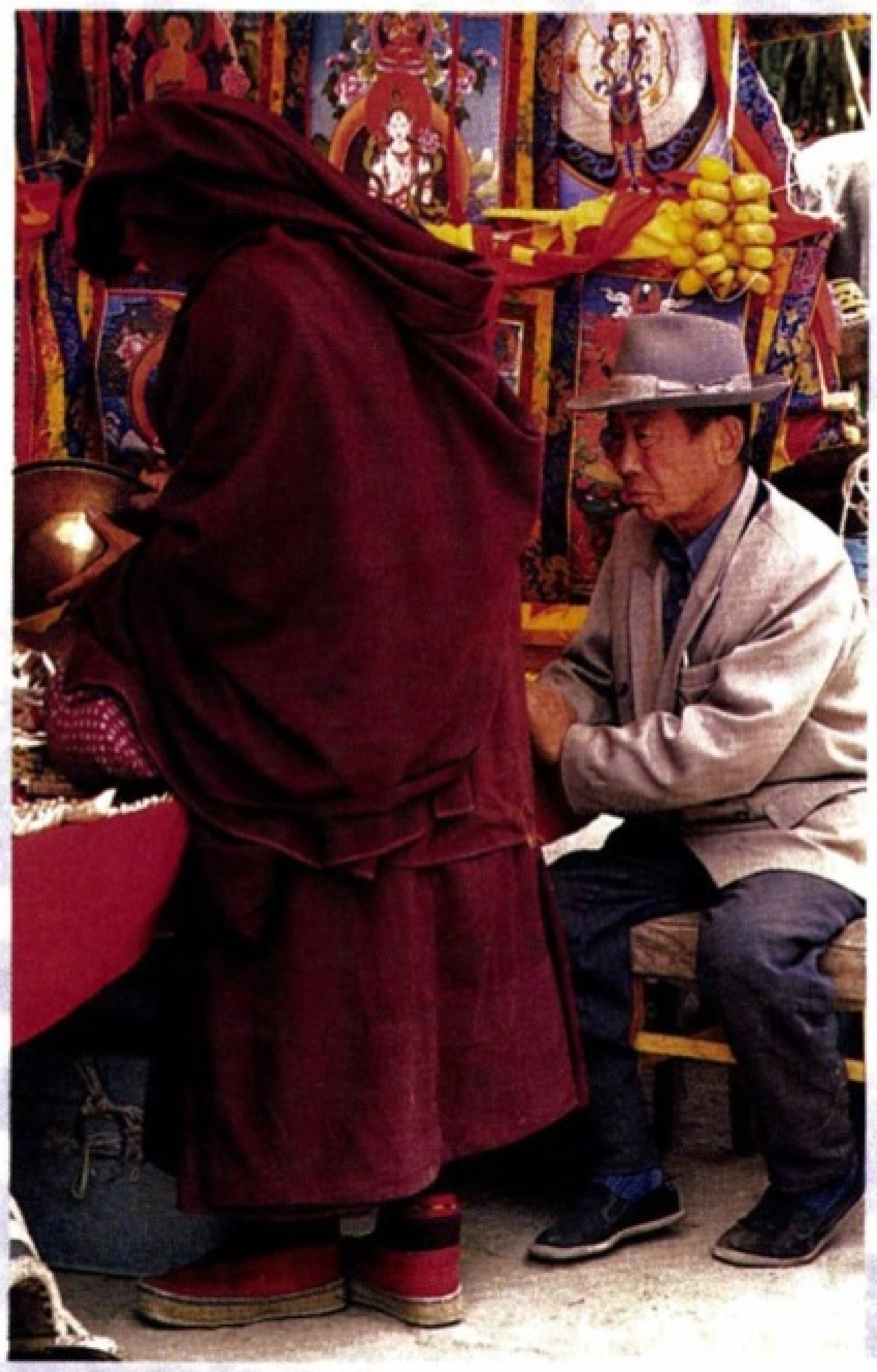
There are currently 732 known political prisoners in Tibet and this year has seen more arrests than at any point in the past five years, according to Robbie Barnett of the Tibet Information Network. The aims of interrogation are: to intimidate prisoners, to extract confessions, to gain information about other protesters and to accomplish 'thought reform' by convincing prisoners of the futility of the goal of Tibetan independence. Prisoners are subjected to an array of different torture methods – electric shocks, chemical injections, exposure to extremes of heat and cold, starvation, and hanging.

According to one prisoner: 'I saw people hanging by ropes tied to their arms behind their backs, suspended with their feet off the ground. Two of the people I saw had their shoulders dislocated by the rope. I saw 12 or 13, a group hanging together. This was to show the rest of us that the same thing could happen to us. They wanted us to give the names of other participants in the demonstration. If we did so we would be dealt with more leniently.'

Since February this year there has been a marked increase in the number of arrests of people living in the Barkhor area as the Chinese remove what they call 'hostile elements'. China is now admitting its policy in Tibet has not worked – and the response is to tighten its grip. This summer a small bomb, planted presumably by Tibetan freedom fighters, partly damaged a Chinese monument in Lhasa. The Chinese authorities in Tibet responded by going into oppressive overdrive, rounding up scores of suspects and tightening the already suffocating net of surveillance.

Most demoralizing for Tibetans today is the way the Chinese have cultivated a network of informers – often within the Tibetan community. A foreigner who used to live in the country told me after a recent trip that he had never known such an intense atmosphere of distrust. 'Whether people are informing or not they suspect each other of doing so. Even close friends and family members can't trust each other. It's doing terrible damage to the social fabric. Everyone is afraid. And there is so much police harassment now. Friends of mine who had always been determined to stay in Tibet now say they can't stand it any more.' The tightening of Chinese control and surveillance makes getting reliable information out of Tibet extremely difficult: it's far too risky now for Tibetans to try.

Recently, the Chinese have been turning their suspicion onto Tibetan communist cadres with government jobs – their former 'allies'. They are now deemed 'unreliable' and prone to sympathy with the independence cause.


TIM NUNN

Chinese merchant making a buck from Buddhism.

Meanwhile, back in the Barkhor the mundane marketplace business of buying and selling seems to be what's on most people's minds right now. This bustling market gives the impression that these Tibetans, at any rate, are doing all right but many of the stalls here are actually owned by Chinese – between 70 and 90 per cent of small businesses in Lhasa are Chinese-owned.

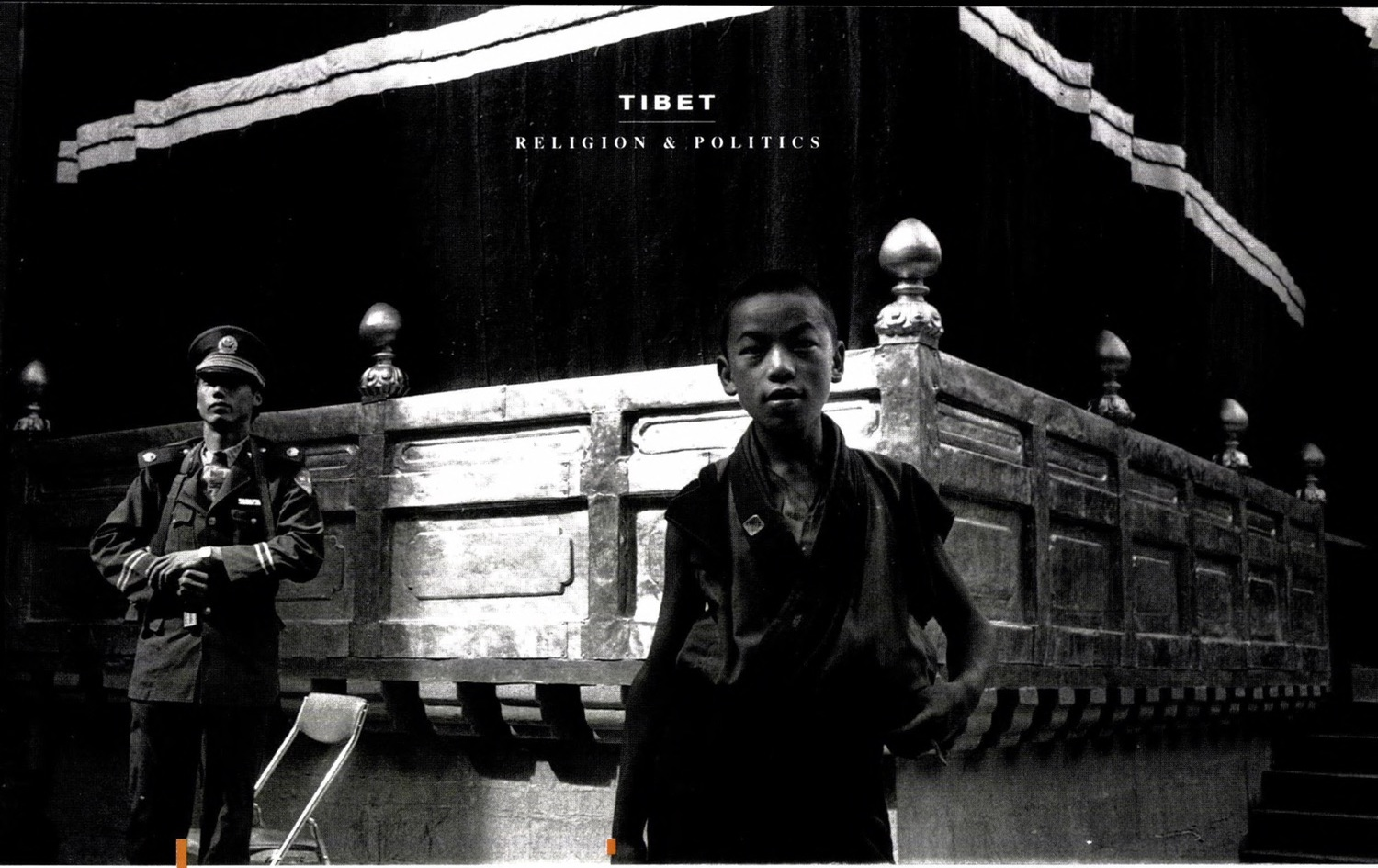
Then at 7.00 in the evening the official traders pack up and all the illegal Tibetan small traders sweep in and start selling bread rolls, vegetables, fruit and clothes. The atmosphere is vigorous and good-humoured. Tibetans do smile and laugh a lot – something which has frequently given visitors the false impression that all's well. 'It's a habit with us,' Tashi Wangdu had said back in Kathmandu. 'But sometimes I think it's a curse.'

Even the beggars look happy. The beggar children with their thumbs up going *cuchi, cuchi* and burying their resolute dirty little faces into your belly until you give them something are more cheeky than pathetic. This might be due partly to the fact that begging is a perfectly accepted part of Buddhist culture and gives the giver an opportunity to accrue merit; there's no loss of dignity for anyone.

In spite of the pressure, the Barkhor is still vigorously Tibetan. For the moment its appeal as a tourist site is probably staying its death sentence. But how much longer I wonder, before the authorities decide to obliterate this last troublesome enclave in their now-Chinese city of Lhasa? ■

The tightening grip of surveillance. Nothing escapes the eyes and ears of Chinese security forces patrolling the streets of Lhasa.

IRENE KRISTALIS / TIBET IMAGE BANK



JIRINA SIMAJCHLOVA / TIBET IMAGE BANK

Learning from the enemy

Why are monks and nuns so involved in the independence struggle? A trip to Drepung, once the biggest monastery in the world, now a breeding ground for rebellious clerics.

I AM STANDING by the roadside shouting at passing buses. It is, I have been told, the thing to do in Lhasa. You shout the name of the place you want to go to and the ticket-collector shouts back. 'Drepung?' I shout. The ticket-collector at the window of a stationary bus nods and we clamber on. Something about the twinkle in her eye tells me to double-check with the driver who emphatically indicates 'No!' The girl giggles. I had heard that Tibetans love practical jokes...

The next bus proves more successful and we set off for Drepung, one of the most important monasteries in Tibet. At the time of the Chinese invasion it boasted 7,700 monks. It's the seat of the Gelugpa – or 'yellow hat' – Buddhist sect, to which the Dalai Lama belongs and which has always played a prominent role in Tibetan politics. These days it's a different kind of politics and Drepung is a hive of protest and activism.

Drepung means 'heap of rice' – and it actually even looks a bit like it, the white buildings piled and sprinkled on the hillside above the town. We take a tractor rickshaw to the top, passing eucalyptus groves and gurgling streams. At the gate we are met with a most incongruous scene. A woman in bright flowing clothes, made up to look like a courtesan, is posing for three male photographers in the window of the monastery's ticket office. One is touching her hair. The scene only becomes slightly less bizarre when we realize that it's a fashion photo-shoot.

Completely unperturbed, a very old monk accompanies us up the steps to the monastery, gently leading us in the right direction around the various shrines and chanting the Buddhist mantra *om mani padme hum* quietly to himself as he goes along.

The fact that Drepung still exists is something of a miracle. In 1959 there were 2,463 monasteries in Tibet. By 1976 there were just 10. What happened in between was the 'Cultural Revolution' during which any display of religion was strictly forbidden – from prayer flags to incense burners,

Kung-fu dialectics. A Drepung monk throws himself into the argument.

TIM NUNN

prostrations to circumambulation.

Only in the 1980s were Tibetans allowed to start practising their religion publicly again. The Chinese decided that religious 'superstition' was tolerable as long as it did not challenge the authority of the Chinese state. They allowed some monasteries to be rebuilt, partly because they realized tourism could become a major source of foreign exchange. The official line became that China wanted to 'protect' Tibetan Buddhist culture, but in a 'scientific' way. The Chinese had finally realized that religion in Tibet had a political power that was not going to go away. It would make more sense to control and manipulate it from inside. In the crudest sense this meant allowing monasteries to exist but stationing police within them.

'No,' say the rebellious clerics of Drepung. They don't want a return to the bad old days of feudalism

The Chinese wish for more involvement in religious affairs came to a head earlier this year in a bizarre row over the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama. The Panchen Lama is the second most important religious figure after the Dalai Lama. The previous Panchen Lama was seen to be a Chinese stooge until he unexpectedly starting making anti-Chinese statements. He died in mysterious circumstances shortly afterwards in 1988.

The search for his reincarnation ended in May this year when the Dalai Lama suddenly announced that the new Panchen Lama – a 6-year-old boy – had been found in Tibet and instated at Tashilhunpo monastery in Shigatse.

The Chinese were outraged. They had wanted to have a say in the selection and had been outmanoeuvred by the Dalai Lama, who made the announcement after just three stages of recognition had been completed instead of the usual five – he said the signs were clear and unambivalent after the third stage. The Chinese reacted by arresting the boy and taking him to Beijing where presumably attempts will be made to 'educate' him to become an ally of China.

The whole furore has, say observers, set back even further the chances of China coming to the negotiating table. The selection of the Panchen Lama is politically sensitive because it is he who will have the final say in the selection of the next Dalai Lama. If the Chinese can get the Panchen Lama on their side, then perhaps the next Dalai Lama will be one of their stooges too.

Meanwhile, the leniency over religion is today being reversed. Restrictions that lapsed during the 1980s are now suddenly being enforced. The 'work units' are back. These are groups of Communist cadres who set about politically educating the monks and nuns and look out for troublemakers. Those who disagree with them most strongly are weeded out and taken into detention. This year cadres demanded that monks at Drepung sign a declaration denouncing the Dalai Lama. They refused and arrests were made.

We walk up Drepung's narrow alleyways winding between the whitewashed stone and timber buildings, passing great wooden doors leading into cloisters and courtyards. It is mid-afternoon and very quiet. There's hardly a soul in sight. Gradually we hear a faint rumble and walk towards it. The noise gradually grows into a roar of voices and a sharp slapping sound.

We follow our ears until we come to the source of the uproar: a central courtyard full of monks debating under the trees. But 'debating' is too sedate a description. 'Kung-Fu dialectics' is more like it: they throw their whole bodies into each exchange, sending off each point with a great clap as one hand comes down from above the head to connect with the other held at knee level. The movement concludes with a challenging smile.

It's four o'clock and time for the afternoon's debate to end. But even as the monks tumble out of the courtyard and down the alleyways, they carry on debating in small groups. It all seems vigorous and good-natured. Logical debate is a cornerstone of Buddhist monastic practice and it's not hard to believe reports that the monks make intellectual mincemeat of the cadres who come to give them a political education.

The Chinese authorities are frustrated. Why can't the monks and nuns just be grateful for the right to practise their religion and keep their noses out of politics? But for Tibetans religious and political freedom are not separable.

According to Tibet specialist Ronald Schwartz, monks and nuns regard their vows as empowering them to act politically. Celibacy, for example, puts them in a better position to sacrifice their lives in the independence cause than those with parental responsibilities. What's more the selfless act of dying for independence guarantees rebirth in the next life as a human being.

Schwartz quotes a young Drepung monk: 'The Chinese are saying that we have freedom of religious faith and so on... But we need real freedom. Through freedom we can make preparations not only for this life, but work for the future lives to come. As the Chinese reject the existence of future lives, that is a difficult point. If one is only talking of freedom to eat and drink, it doesn't have much significance. That can be done by any animal such as a dog or a cat... To be human has a deeper meaning.'

So what exactly do the monks want? Do they want monasteries to be as powerful as they were before the invasion?

'No,' say the rebellious clerics of Drepung. They don't want a return to the bad old days of feudalism. What they do want is an independent democratic Tibet. They spell it out quite clearly in the so-called 'Drepung Manifesto', an 11-page woodblock-printed pamphlet which envisages no special political role for the Dalai Lama or for monks in such a democratic Tibet.

The monks who drew up the Drepung Manifesto are fairly typical of monks these days. They are young and come from poor rural backgrounds. Their first project was to translate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into Tibetan and to take it out to the villagers. The monks insist that it's Buddhism that 'accords with the general practice of the contemporary world', not Communism.

It's ironic. The Communist cadres who went into monasteries to 'raise political consciousness' among Tibetans have succeeded – but with a different result than they intended. The 'work units' may be back in action at Drepung but the young monks who argue so animatedly in the cobbled lanes are probably busy making the best use of this adversity. As the Dalai Lama says: 'You can learn much from your enemy – much more than from your friend.' ■

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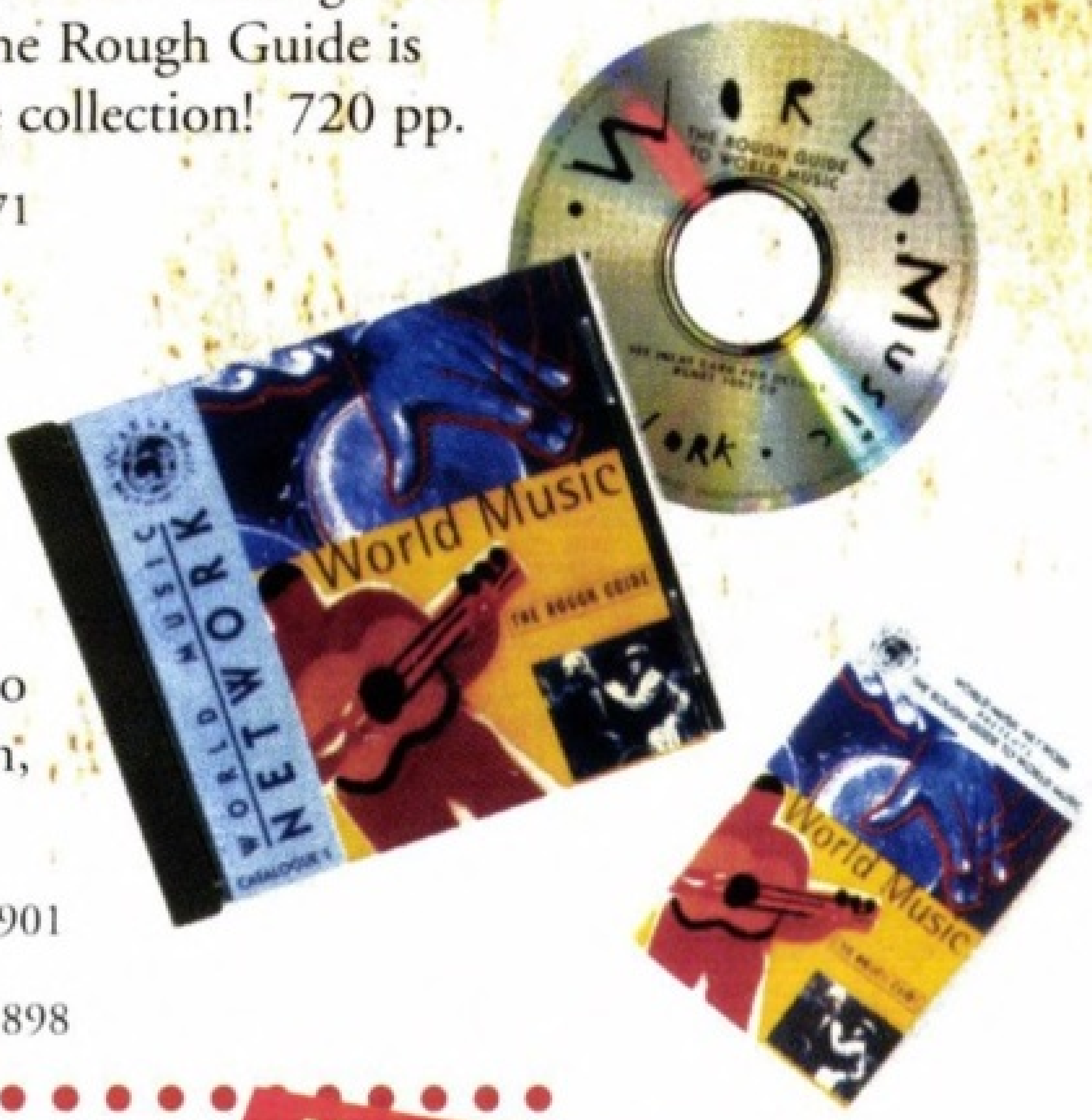

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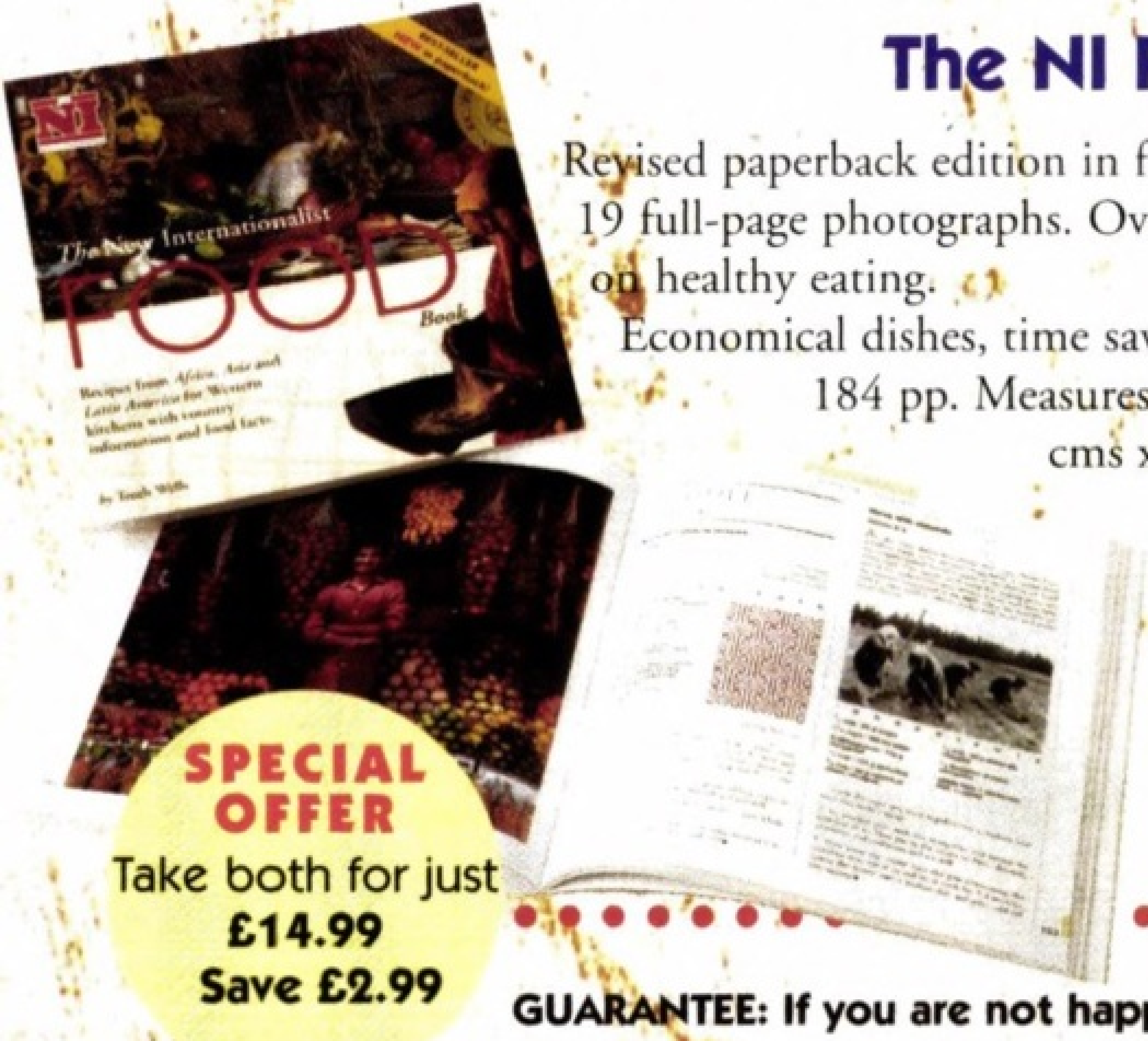

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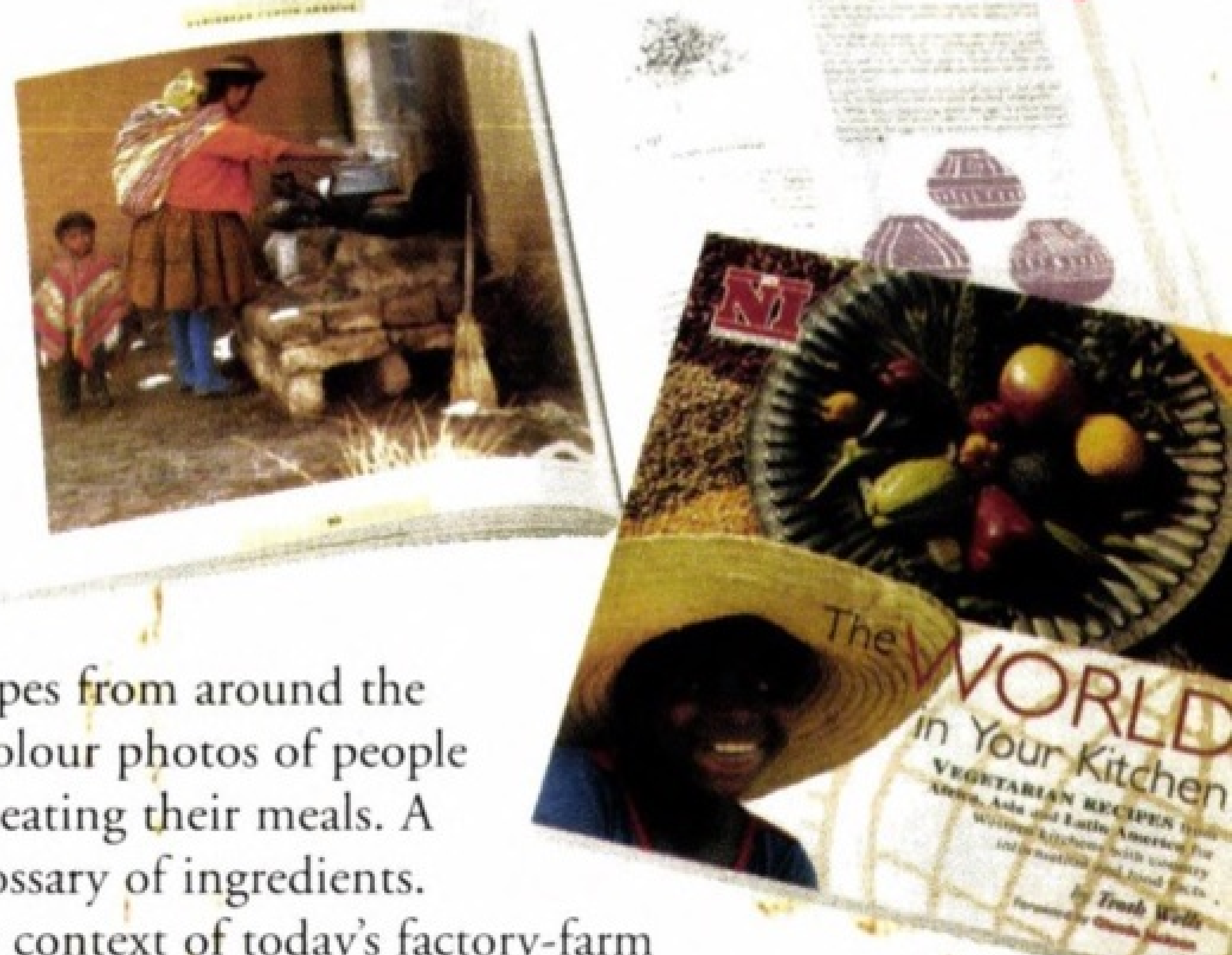

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If I die, it's nothing

Nuns had little influence in pre-occupation Tibet but they have led 55 of the 126 known pro-independence protests in Lhasa in the past six years – and the authorities have responded with particular brutality, adding sexual torture to their array of repressive tactics. ZIMPA PHARMO is 23 years old and looks shy and withdrawn. I wonder if I am going to get more than two words out of her. But as she tells her extraordinary story her whisper grows and her narrative comes cascading out, like a strong-flowing river.

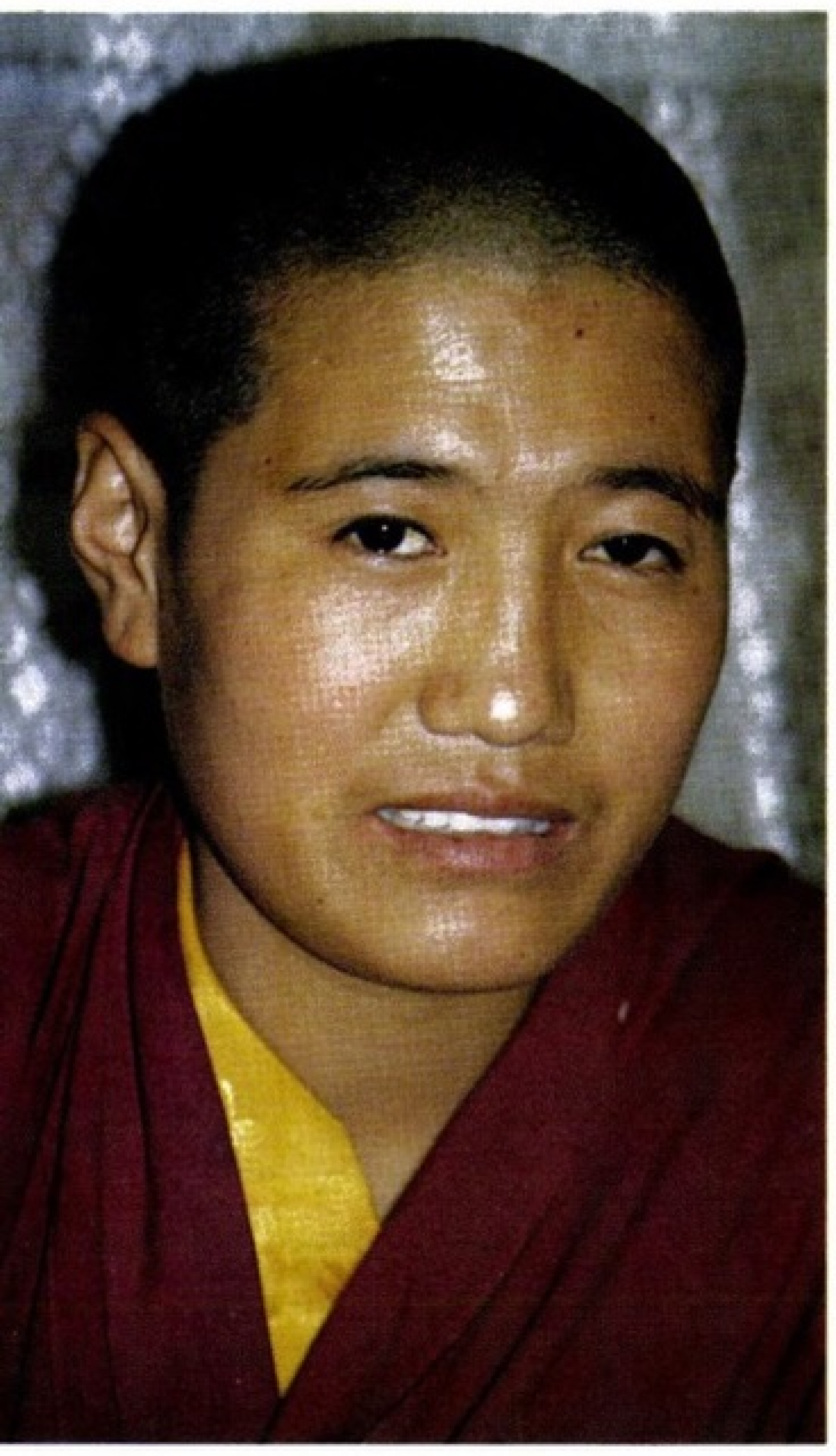
THERE WERE SEVEN OF US. We carried posters saying 'Freedom!' and 'Go back to China!' and chanted slogans. The security forces attacked, seizing some of the nuns. But I managed to run away. As a soldier came towards me I threw a stone and hit him on the head. The other soldiers caught me and beat me with an electric cattle prod until I lost consciousness. By the time I got to jail I could not stand up.

They started interrogating me. I told them I was fighting for our freedom. They told me they would kill me in a week's time. I said: 'Good. Many monks and nuns have died. If I die, it's nothing.'

I was taken to the hospital where the soldier I had injured was being treated. He had lost a lot of blood and I was forced to give him my blood. I was very weak when I got back to the jail. They stripped me naked except for a pair of transparent white underpants. Urine was poured over me and excrement forced into my mouth, nose, eyes and ears.

They started interrogating me. I told them I was fighting for our freedom. They told me they would kill me in a week's time. I said: 'Good. Many monks and nuns have died. If I die, it's nothing...'

VANESSA BAIRD



Afterwards I managed to get hold of a small knife. I decided that before they killed me I would kill one of the soldiers. I threw the knife at him, but missed. To punish me they stabbed me in the arm with the knife.

Another day they applied stinging leaves all over my whole body. Again I was beaten. Many officers came to see me. They asked me: 'Who told you that Tibet was for Tibetans? Tell us names and we will punish you less.' But I refused.

Then they showed me a film of a young monk being crucified. He was shouting for freedom while they were doing it. Then they poured kerosene on him and set him alight. The soldiers clapped when he died and the film ended. They told me the same would happen to me. I was so angry but I was tied up and there was nothing I could do. I was forced to watch the film every day for the next three days.

TIN / TIBET IMAGE BANK

They told me they had changed their minds, they would punish me for many years and *then* kill me. I was tortured for two hours, every day, for a month. There was a machine which made my body very hot.

After that they put me to work cleaning the soldiers' toilets with my bare hands. I did this for one month. During this time I also cleaned the officers' jeeps. One day I was told that some important officers were coming to see me. But only one showed up. To my surprise he was Tibetan. He started asking me questions and when I answered, his eyes filled with tears. He started planning to help me and another nun escape in one of the jeeps we were cleaning. We hid in the back while the driver, also a Tibetan, drove us out of the prison.

We soon had to leave the jeep and continue on foot. We headed for the mountains, walking at night. Seven days later an old peasant discovered us. He said: 'You are the escaped nuns aren't you?' We denied it. But he took us to a shelter and gave us his own clothes to keep warm. We were very weak by now. Every day he would bring us *tsampa* to eat. After ten days, when we were stronger, he brought us heavy clothing and wigs and showed us the way over the mountains to India.

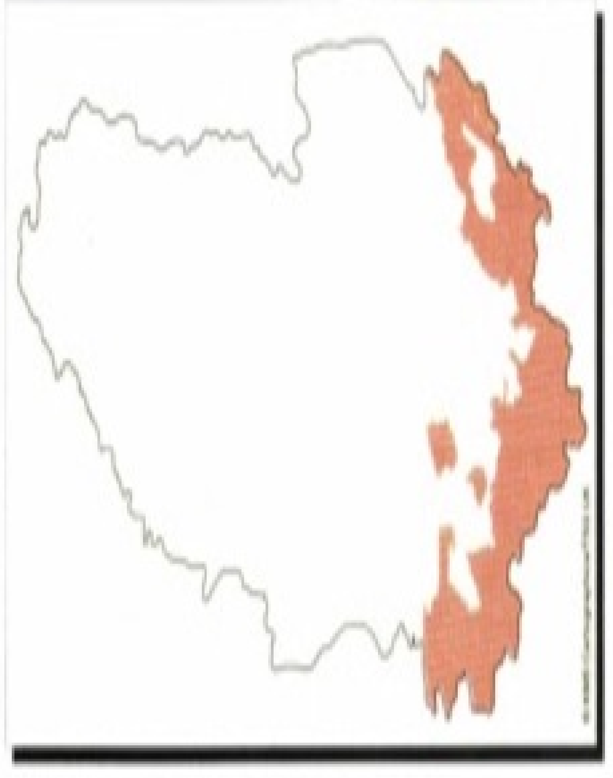
Once in India we were taken to Sikkim jail. It was really nice there. They treated me well, gave me nice food. I was really ill and they gave me hospital treatment. I stayed there for three years. On my release I came here to Dharamsala. My health is still not good. I get very depressed and my concentration is bad. Now I'm taking part in a rehabilitation programme for torture survivors and I'm hoping that will help. ■

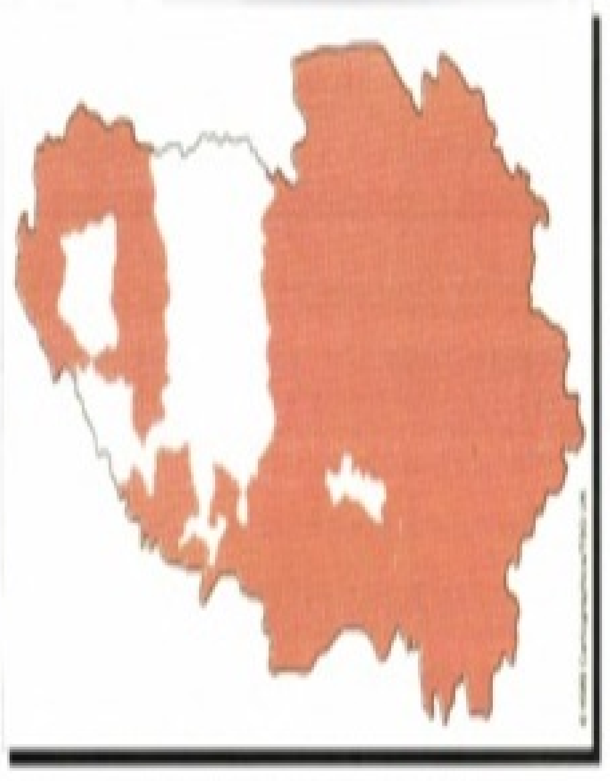
Above: Zimpa Pharmo. Right: A nun being interrogated by Chinese police. Imprisoned nuns are not allowed to shave their heads.

TIBET – THE FACTS

PEOPLE

TIBETANS CLAIM THAT THE FLOOD OF CHINESE MIGRATION HAS TURNED THEM INTO A MINORITY IN THEIR OWN COUNTRY.


Chinese settled in Tibet in 1949


Chinese settled in Tibet in 1995 [1]

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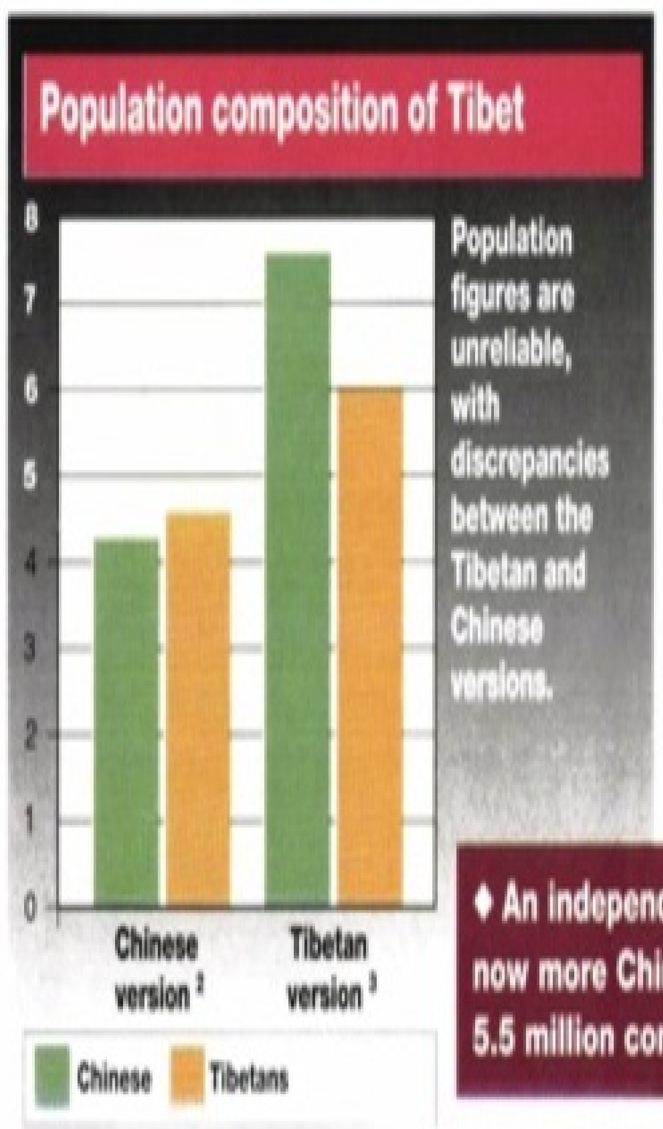


Population figures are unreliable, with discrepancies between the Tibetan and Chinese versions.

♦ Chinese figures do not include Chinese military personnel, estimated to number 150,000-250,000 in the whole of Tibet.[4]

♦ 120,000-130,000 Tibetans live in exile [3]

♦ An independent survey confirms that there are now more Chinese in Tibet than Tibetans – 5.0 to 5.5 million compared with 4.2 million.[1]

HUMAN RIGHTS

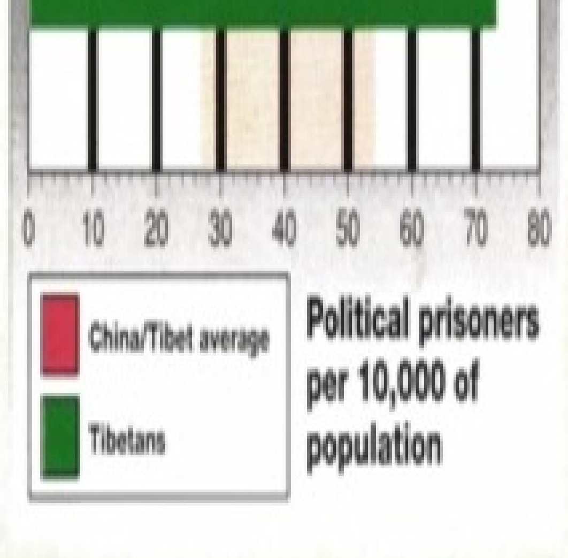
CHINA HAS A BAD HUMAN-RIGHTS RECORD IN GENERAL BUT ITS RECORD IN RELATION TO TIBETANS IS APPALLING. 30 % OF TIBETAN POLITICAL PRISONERS ARE WOMEN.[4]

♦ **Political deaths:** In Tibet there have been 13 deaths in or shortly after custody since 1990 [4]

♦ **Detentions:** There are 732 known political prisoners in Tibet [4]

♦ **Slave labour:** An estimated 16-20 million prisoners are held in 4,000-6,000 *laogai* or 'labour reform camps' in China and Tibet. Slave labour from these camps earns China several hundred million dollars.[6]

♦ **Birth control:** Coercion is an integral part of Chinese family-planning policies, and there are reports of forced sterilizations and abortions. Fines can be as high as 10 to 15 times the average rural income. Rules for Chinese are even stricter. [7]



Political prisoners per 10,000 of population

♦ **Chinese rule:** According to the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, 1.2 million Tibetans died between 1949 and 1979 of causes related to the Chinese occupation – during combat, by execution, through torture, through starvation and by suicide. [12]

GIVE AND TAKE

CHINA CLAIMS TO BE PUMPING HUGE SUMS OF DEVELOPMENT MONEY INTO TIBET. HOW MUCH IT IS TAKING OUT IN TERMS OF NATURAL RESOURCES IS NOT DISCLOSED.

IN: China spends $270 million per year on 'development' in Tibet.[2]

OUT: Half of Tibet's forests have been felled since 1959 – providing the Chinese with $50 billion worth of timber.[7]

More than a quarter of Tibet's mineral resources have been extracted since 1959.[8]

♦ China is short of natural resources. Within the next decade 7 of the 15 key staple minerals essential to its economy will run out. In Tibet 126 types of minerals, with major deposits of uranium, lithium, bauxite, borax, chromite, copper, gold, iron, and silver have been identified by the Chinese.[9]

CHINA'S PLANS FOR TIBET:

♦ To achieve economic growth at 10% per year until 2000.

♦ To industrialize agriculture and boost grain production to one million tons per year.

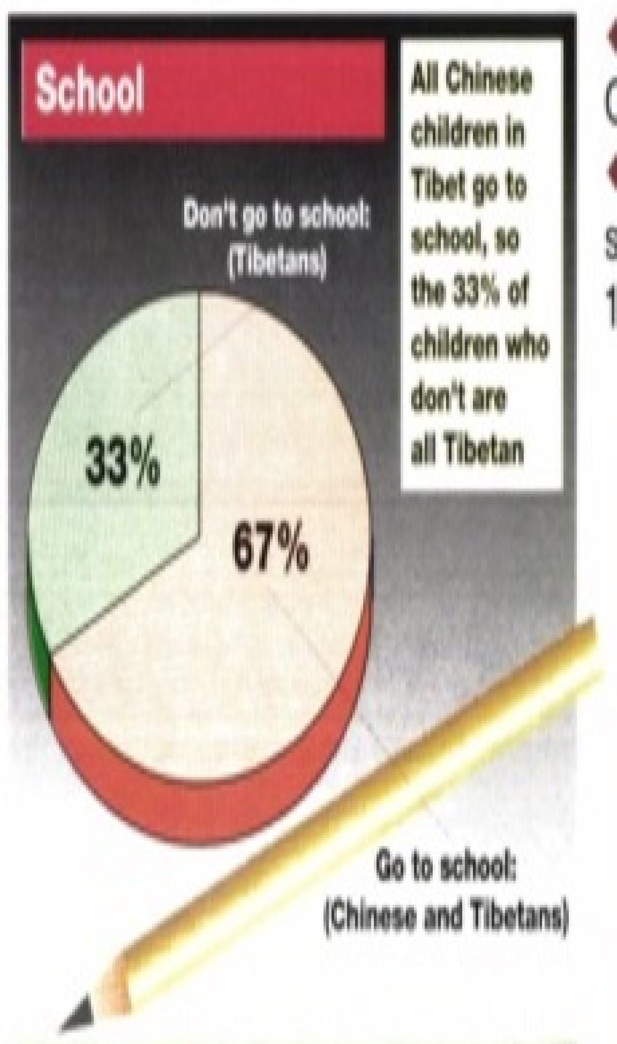
♦ To build a US 2.6 billion Tibet-China rail link, to aid migration and transport resources.

♦ To encourage foreign investment.[8]

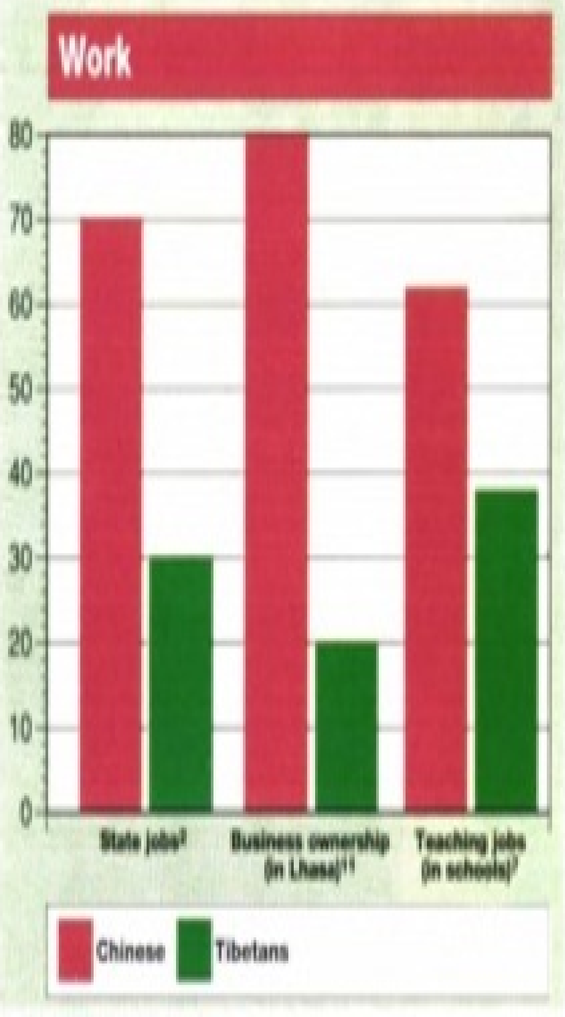
TIBETAN TREASURE
CHINA
HOLD
HOLD
HOLD
PLAY

DISCRIMINATION

CHINESE MIGRANTS HAVE FAR GREATER ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND JOBS THAN ETHNIC TIBETANS.



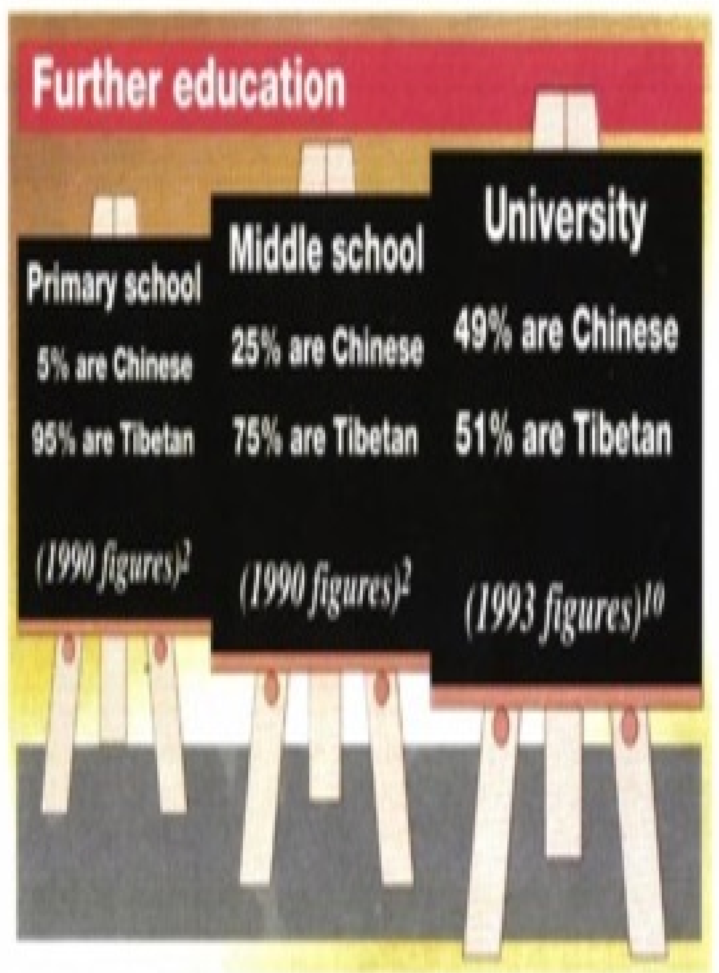
All Chinese children in Tibet go to school, so the 33% of children who don't are all Tibetan



♦ Tibetans still far outnumber Chinese in the TAR area of Tibet. Yet the Chinese dominate the key areas of employment.

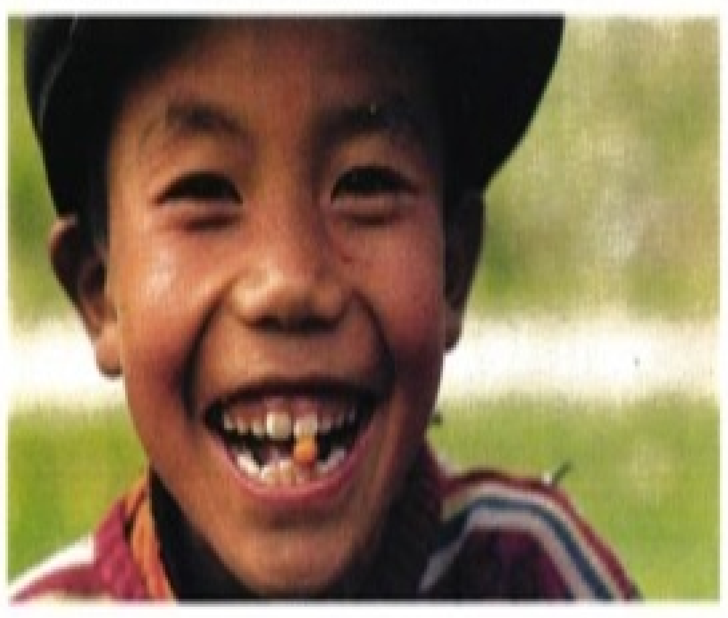
♦ Tibetans and Chinese are segregated at school. Chinese classes get better teachers and facilities.[7]

♦ 45% of Tibetans aged 15 and over are illiterate or semi-literate, three times the average Chinese rate of 15%.[7]



Primary school	Middle school	University
5% are Chinese	25% are Chinese	49% are Chinese
95% are Tibetan	75% are Tibetan	51% are Tibetan
(1990 figures)[2]	*(1990 figures)*[2]	*(1993 figures)*[10]

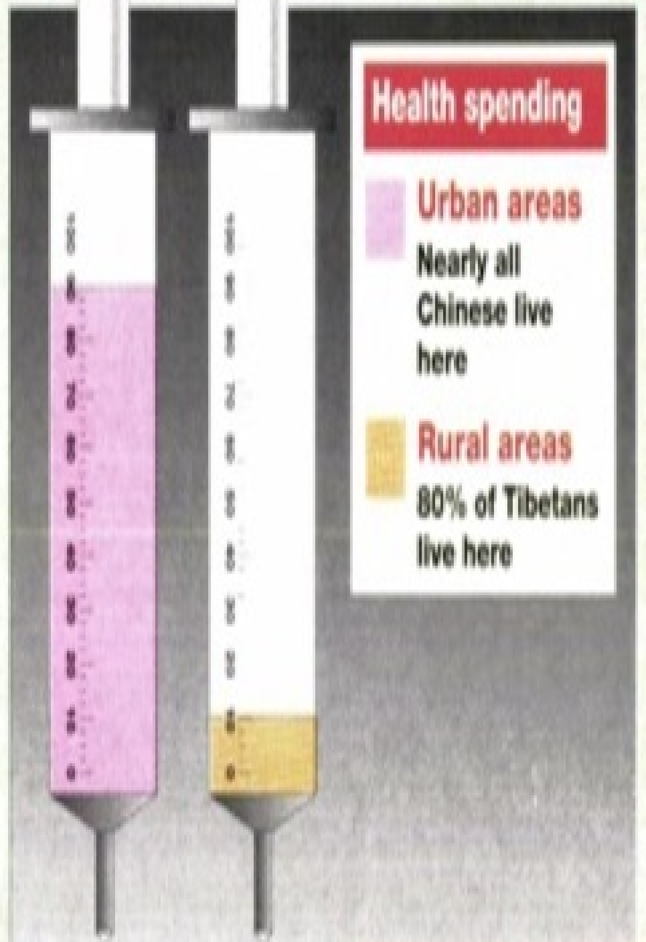
♦ According to official statistics the children of Chinese migrants make up only 3.7 per cent of the child population. But Chinese is the dominant language in secondary education and Chinese children get much further than Tibetans.



PHOTOS: TIM NUNN

SURVIVAL

CHINA'S COMMUNIST RULE BROUGHT SCIENCE AND MODERN MEDICINE TO TIBET. BUT AFTER 45 YEARS OF OCCUPATION, THE BASIC HEALTH AND SURVIVAL NEEDS OF TIBETANS ARE FAR FROM BEING MET.

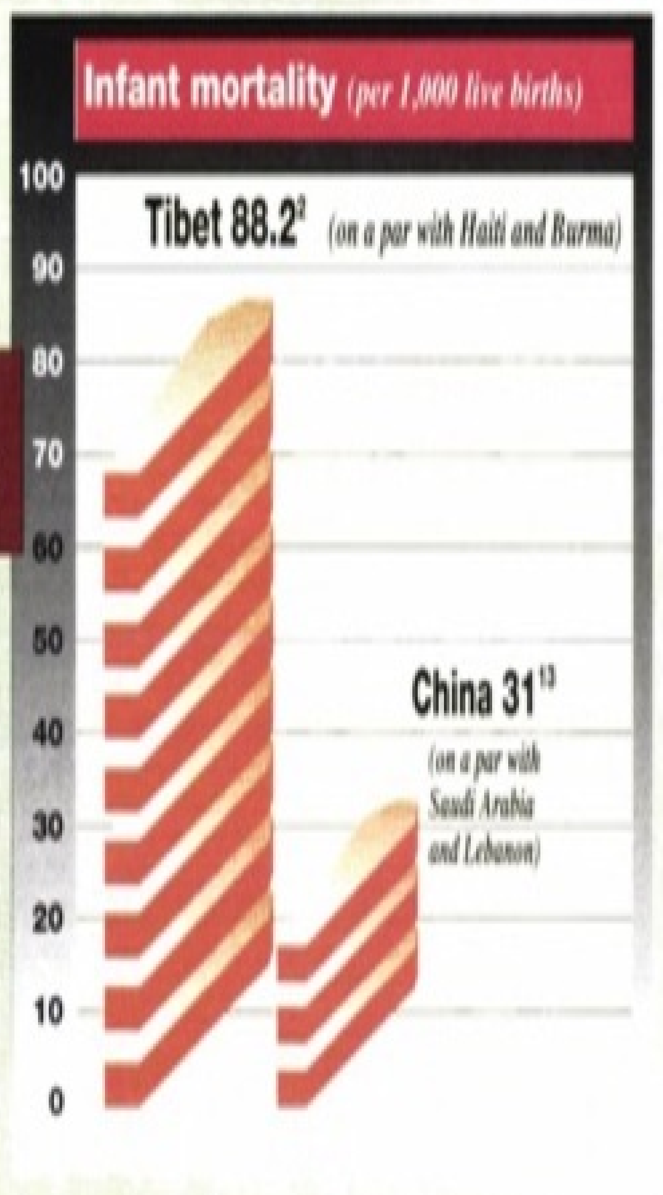


HEALTH AND WEALTH

♦ To be admitted into hospital as an in-patient a deposit of $60 has to be paid. This is almost as much as a Tibetan rural worker can hope to earn in a year.[7]

♦ Chinese citizens are offered wages 87% higher than in China as an incentive to settle in Tibet.[7]

Life expectancy
♦ China 70[13] ♦ Tibet 61[2]



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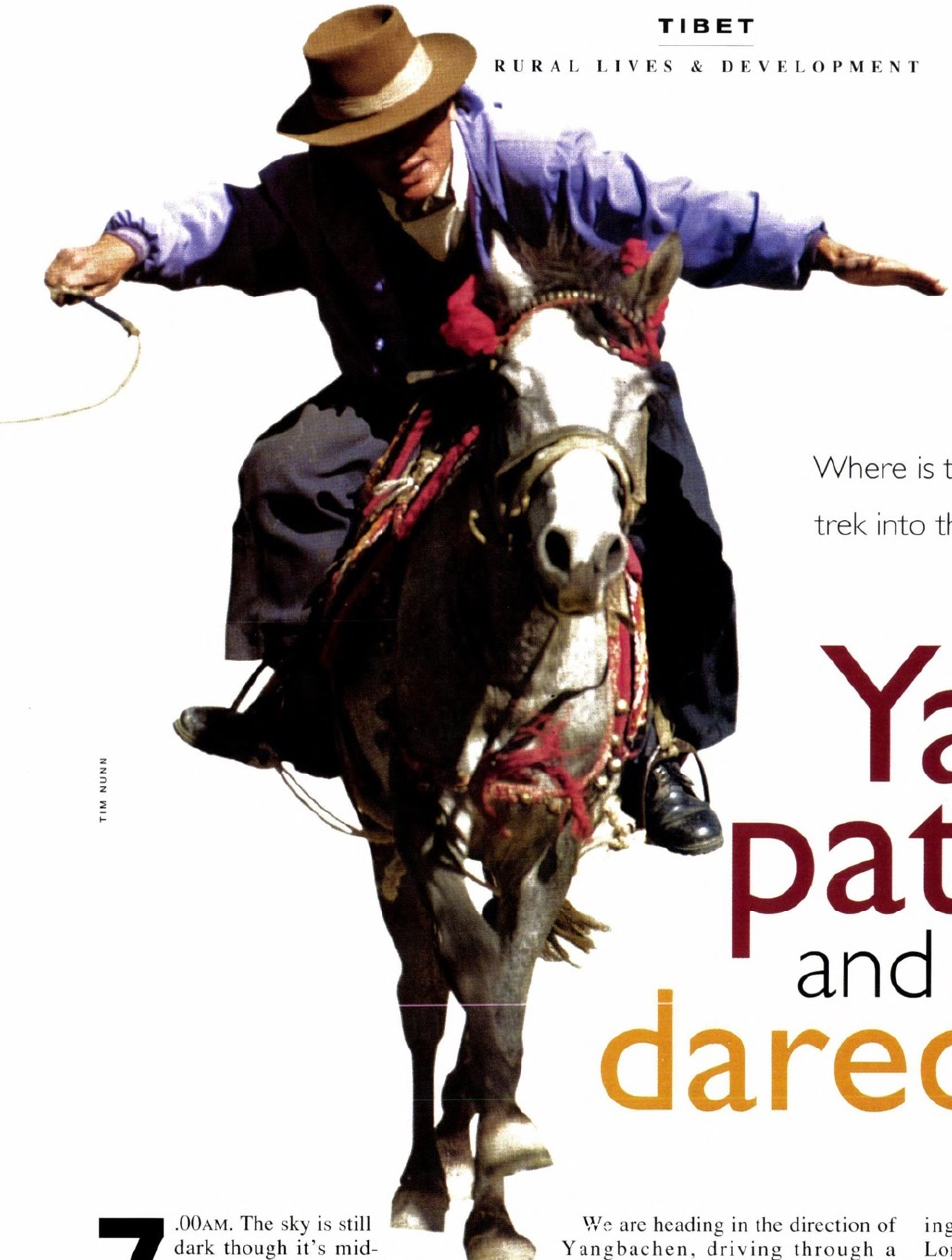
1 *The New Majority,* independent report by Anders Hojmark Andersen, Sarah Cooke, Michael Wills published by the Tibet Support Group, London, 1995. **2** People's Republic of China, Beijing, 1990 figures. **3** Department of Information and International Relations, Tibetan Government in Exile, Dharamsala, 1995. **4** Tibet Information Network, London, 1995. **5** Amnesty International. London, 1995. **6** Loagai Research Foundation run by Harry Wu, US. **7** *Tibet Facts,* Tibet Support Group, London 1995. **8** UNIDO, 1994. **9** Xinhua News Agency, 16 March 1991. **10** People's Republic of China, 1994. **11** *Strangers in Their Own Country,* Tibetan Youth Congress, Dharamsala 1994. **12** *Tibet: Proving Truth From Facts,* DIIR, Dharamsala, 1994. **13** Human Development Report, 1991.



TIM NUNN

Where is the real Tibet? A trek into the countryside...

Yaks, pats and daredevils

7.00AM. The sky is still dark though it's midsummer. We are on Beijing time here: the 'unity of the motherland' will have nothing to do with different time zones, however illogical the consequences. A bone-rattler of a hired jeep arrives. Five of us are set for a trip into the countryside, where 86 per cent of Tibetans live.

Our destination is Tsurphu, 70 kilometres and about three hours' bumpy ride north-west of Lhasa. The driver is a tousle-haired Tibetan who looks as if he should still be in bed. We soon leave behind the wide streets of Lhasa and hit a stone-slab road. There were no roads in Tibet at the time of the invasion and so road-building was the first development imperative for the Chinese. Tibetan forced labour was used, though Chinese sources say that many of their own people died too, unused as they were to working at such high altitudes.

We are heading in the direction of Yangbachen, driving through a fertile plain filled with high-growing wheat. Before 1950 Tibet was self-sufficient in food and barley was the staple. Then the Chinese ordered that 80 per cent of arable land be planted with wheat instead of barley. It was a disaster: the altitude and climate were far better suited to barley than wheat. The combination of crop failure and the export of grain and meat to China resulted in Tibet's first-ever famine.

Today large-scale plans to develop Tibet's agriculture have sparked off international controversy. In 1989 a major UN irrigation project in the Lhasa Valley benefited not Tibetan farmers but the 130,000 Chinese settlers who moved into the area to take advantage of it. Critics claim the proposed $9-million Panam Rural Integrated Development Project, funded by the European Community, will also benefit Chinese rather than Tibetans. Hard lobbying for a change of emphasis by the London-based Tibet Support Group and others earlier this year has led European Commissioners to pause for time to 'reflect'. The Chinese are now threatening to back out of the scheme altogether.

We cross a river over a rickety wooden bridge. The road becomes a rough, winding track – and too great a challenge for the piece of rubber that's holding the jeep's rear doors together. As we climb higher the air gets thinner and the vegetation seems violently green in the bright sunlight. The sky is the deepest of blues behind the rich mauve and golden brown of the mountains. Every now and again a snow-capped peak appears, like a sudden blessing.

Wild creatures appear. A hare here. An eagle there. Little finch-like birds with orange feathers that reveal themselves brightly in flight. A generation ago Tibetan children were ordered to kill creatures – birds, mice, rabbits, rats, insects – as part of a China-wide campaign against crop-

TIM NUNN

eating 'pests'. This played havoc with the balance of nature and also ran contrary to Buddhist teaching which is against taking life in any form. Thankfully the birds have come back.

People are few and far between up here. Most are semi-nomadic, cultivating their plots of land but also travelling with their animals in search of pasture when they need to. Life looks as if it has not changed in thousands of years. There are no electricity cables, no paved roads, schools or clinics. Life seems to continue untouched by the Chinese occupation.

Looks are deceptive. The Chinese may not yet live in the countryside in any large numbers, but they are still in control. Communist collectivization may have failed – there was a rural rebellion in 1969 – but the authorities still tell the farmers what to grow.

We've reached the end of the track and the monastery of Tsurphu. It looks, well, like something out of an **NI** Calendar – a walled city nestling in the mountains in the early morning light, juniper-incense smoke wafting over its turrets.

We climb out of the jeep. There are monks crouching by the walls and we head vaguely in their direction, fortunately discovering just in time that they are not engaged in a meditation on stones, but rather answering the call of nature. We head swiftly in the opposite direction, to be followed equally swiftly by a flock of sparrow-like child monks, full of early-morning playfulness.

We set off to walk over to the other side of the mountain and come upon a river, whose banks are soft, mossy and covered in tiny blue flowers. A small boy appears out of nowhere and shows us where to cross. He has a sweet unassuming face and flowers behind his ears. He comes from a nearby farm where we meet his mother and a younger child who is engrossed in a game with a yak pat. As we leave and carry on up the mountain a third child appears.

VANESSA BAIRD

Illegal image: the Chinese have prohibited the sale of images of the Dalai Lama like the one this farmer wears around his neck.

I wonder: is this child one too many in Chinese eyes? Not in Tibetan eyes, for sure. Rural families are meant to be large. But if this woman has fallen foul of birth-control restrictions she may be in trouble.

At first Tibet and other underpopulated rural areas were exempt from the strict family-planning measures – including the one-child policy – introduced by Beijing in 1979. But in 1992 it became the mission of local authorities to control strictly births in areas inhabited by minorities, no matter how remote. Cadres who achieved results were promoted, those who failed were demoted. In some regions specially trained Chinese teams would tour villages looking for women pregnant with their third or fourth child – sometimes even their second. When caught they were coerced – sometimes even physically forced – into having an abortion. Some women were sterilized without their consent.

Traditionally women in Tibetan society had a relatively good position. They suffered neither foot-binding like their Chinese sisters nor widow-burning as in India. Polyandry was an accepted custom and Tibetan women could choose to marry or divorce as they pleased. Often it was women who ran the house and controlled the purse-strings. There's a Tibetan saying that goes: 'The woman has the brains and the man has the brawn. Put them together and you have a good combination.'

It's one o'clock. Time to head back to the monastery and be blessed by the new 10-year-old lama, known as the Karmapa. The boy has already been whisked off to Beijing, where he was induced to make a pro-Chinese statement about 'the unity of the Motherland'. But that hasn't stopped pilgrims coming from all around to be blessed by him. They are queuing up the steps of the monastery now. We are ushered into a downstairs room, where a sign asks us to make a donation 'for the monkees'. Then we are herded up a ladder into a room from which comes the thrilling sound of brass horns, bells and chanting. We are blessed by the Karmapa – a very bored-looking boy, it must be said – hastened out again and it's all over in no time.

Altitude sickness is hitting hard now – we are 4,600 metres high – and I'm feeling about as spiritually edified as the jeep driver looks happy. He wants to go back now, he says, even more sulkily than at seven o'clock this morning. Okay, but can we stop off along the way? No way, he says. He has no permit for stopping. We plead. He grumbles. Just a little stop, no-one will know. He grumbles some more and maybe agrees.

We drive till we come across a group of women and children out on a washing expedition by the river. I plonk myself firmly down on the grass beside them – and upon a decidedly fresh yak pat. Luckily I manage to slope off relatively unnoticed, remove the offending garment and give it a good wash in cold crystal-clear water. When I get back a girl is showing these unexpected foreigners how to eat the delicious inner skins of pea-pods.

> ***Is this child one too many in Chinese eyes? Not in Tibetan eyes, for sure. Rural families are meant to be large***

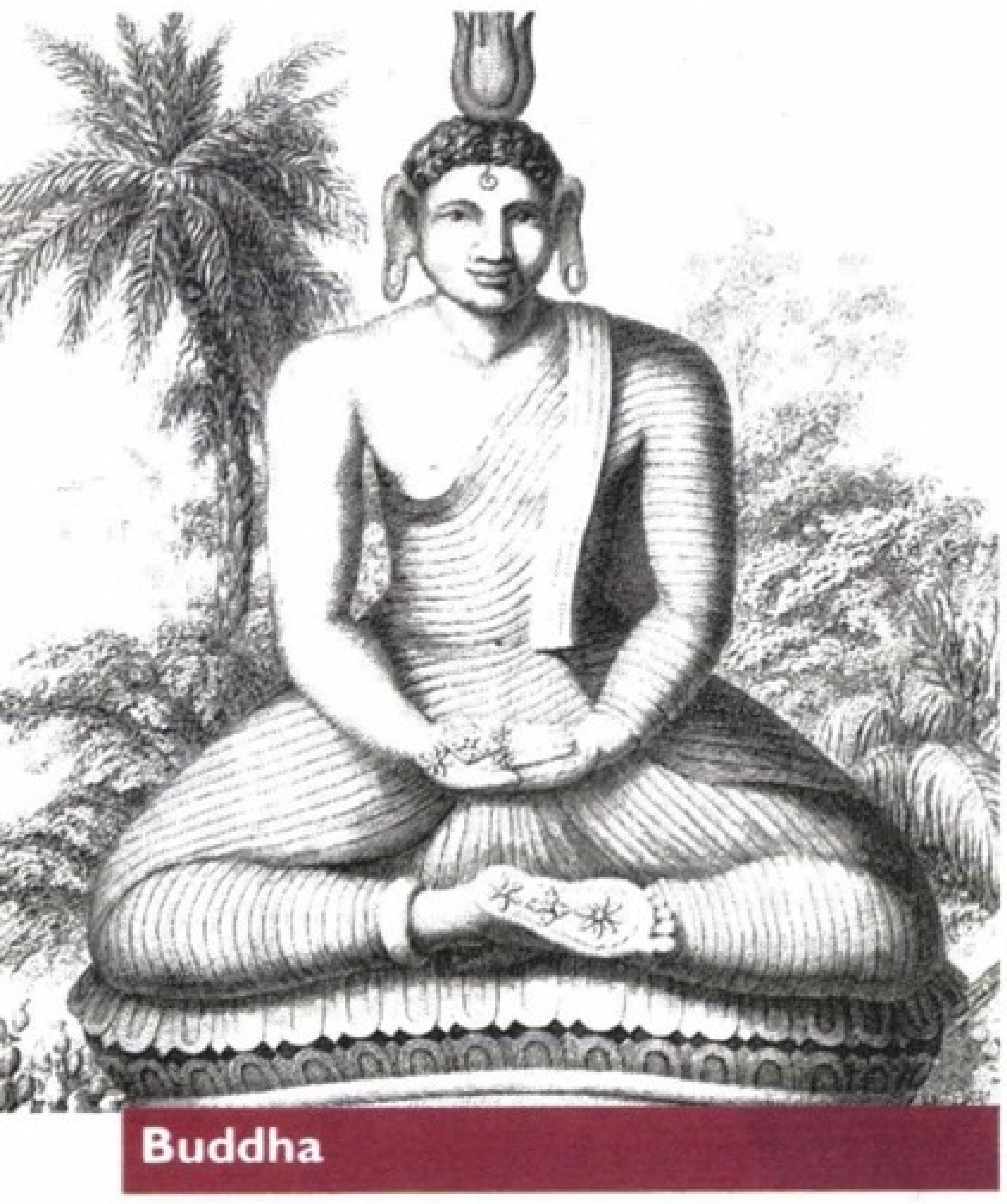
As we set off again the driver looks resolute. It looks like no more stops. But no-one has reckoned on the allure of Tibetan horse races. When we come upon a gathering of scores of people partying and some daredevil horseriders the driver has no problem stopping.

Time after time horses come thundering along the track, riders leaning perilously out of the saddle to draw a line on the ground with a stick. A woman keeps plying us with barley wine – potent stuff at this altitude. We stay a couple of hours and the driver seems well placated – whether by the races or the barley wine is not clear.

On re-entering Lhasa it feels like we have left behind the true Tibet. We are back to a prison of soldiers everywhere as we pass a ponderous bronze statue of two yaks, symbol of the Chinese 'liberation of Tibet'.

Three days later we leave Tibet. As we leave a large aircraft lands and disgorges yet more soldiers. Five days later foreigners are ordered out by the next available means of transport. Tibet is once more closed to foreigners until further notice. ■

Tibet – a history



Buddha

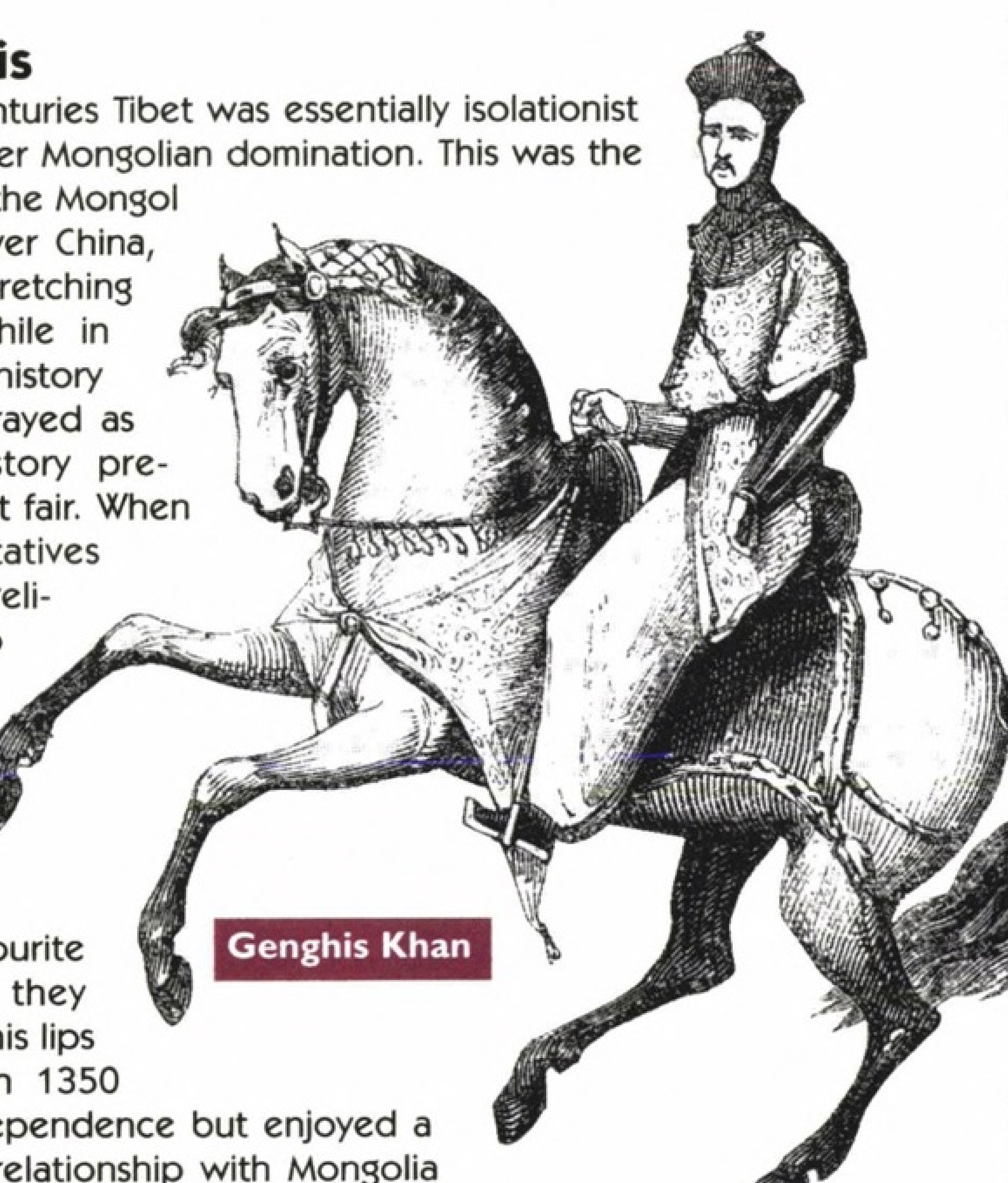
A farewell to arms

Tibet was a great military power back in the seventh century. A succession of kings – the most famous of whom was Srongsten Gampo – expanded Tibet far beyond its present boundaries, south into India and west into China. The Chinese Emperor then had to pay annual tribute of 10,000 rolls of silk to Tibet – a fact conveniently forgotten amid China's current claims of 'historical' dominance.

It was during Srongsten Gampo's reign that Buddhism was introduced to the Tibetan court by two of his wives, one Nepalese and the other Chinese. By the end of the eighth century it had largely supplanted the native Bon religion. As Buddhism spread a wonderful thing happened. The previously warlike Tibetans gradually 'laid their weapons at the foot of the [Lord Buddha's] Lotus throne and forswore the arts of war'. By the end of the tenth century Tibet had withdrawn from Chinese and Indian territories. Tibetans did not entirely forget their military past, and no-one dared invade them, but they were no longer an expansionist people.

Tea with Genghis

For the next three centuries Tibet was essentially isolationist but in 1207 it fell under Mongolian domination. This was the age of Genghis Khan, the Mongol warlord who ruled over China, Korea and territories stretching as far as Europe. While in Chinese and Persian history Genghis Khan is portrayed as barbaric, Tibetan history presents him as tough but fair. When he invited representatives from all the world's religions to his court to determine which was best, Tibetan Buddhists won the day – telling Genghis to sit in his favourite chair with a cup of his favourite brew beside him, they made the cup rise to his lips of its own accord. In 1350 Tibet resumed its independence but enjoyed a unique priest-patron relationship with Mongolia for the next few centuries. Tibetans looked after the spiritual welfare of the Mongols while Mongol lords made generous gifts to Tibetan monasteries and guaranteed Tibet's defence against would-be invaders.



Genghis Khan

High Lamas and uncanny children

Out of this relatively stable religious climate emerged the Dalai Lama system. The Dalai Lama was to be both spiritual leader and head of state. When he died the search would begin for the child into whose body his spirit had chosen to be reincarnated. The first Dalai Lama, Pema Dorje (which means Lotus Thunderbolt), was born in 1391 of very poor peasants in the western highlands. From the day he was born miraculous things happened around him. By 1419 he was the first High Lama of Drepung, which was to become the biggest monastery in the world. Many of Tibet's great monasteries were founded during his reign and Buddhist thought and practice flourished. A few years after he died his successor was discovered in an uncannily mature child who had memories of a past life. The system worked relatively smoothly. Tibet prospered, especially during the the reign of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama who started building the Potala Palace, still the treasure house of Tibetan culture today.

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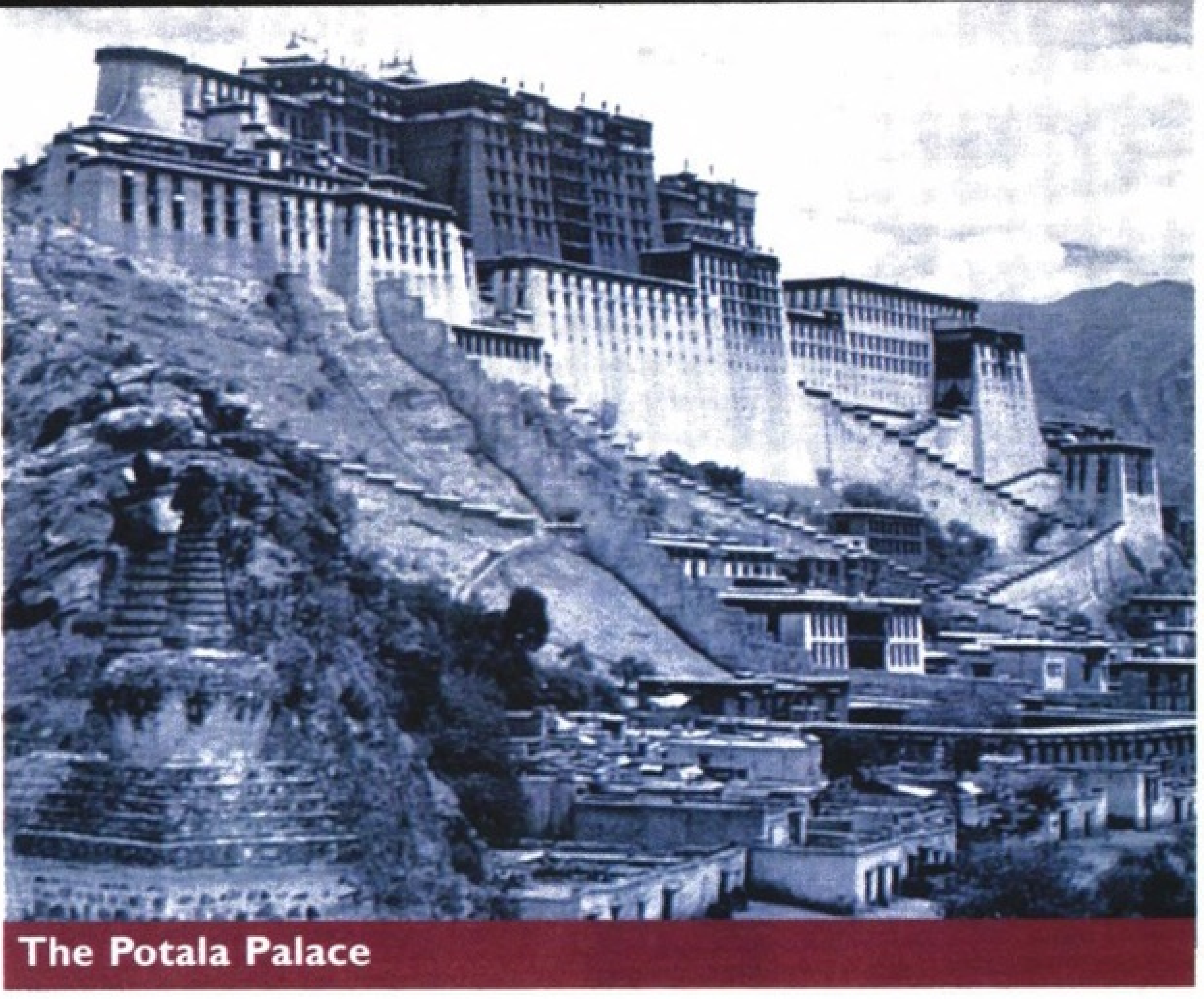


TIBET IMAGE BANK

The Potala Palace

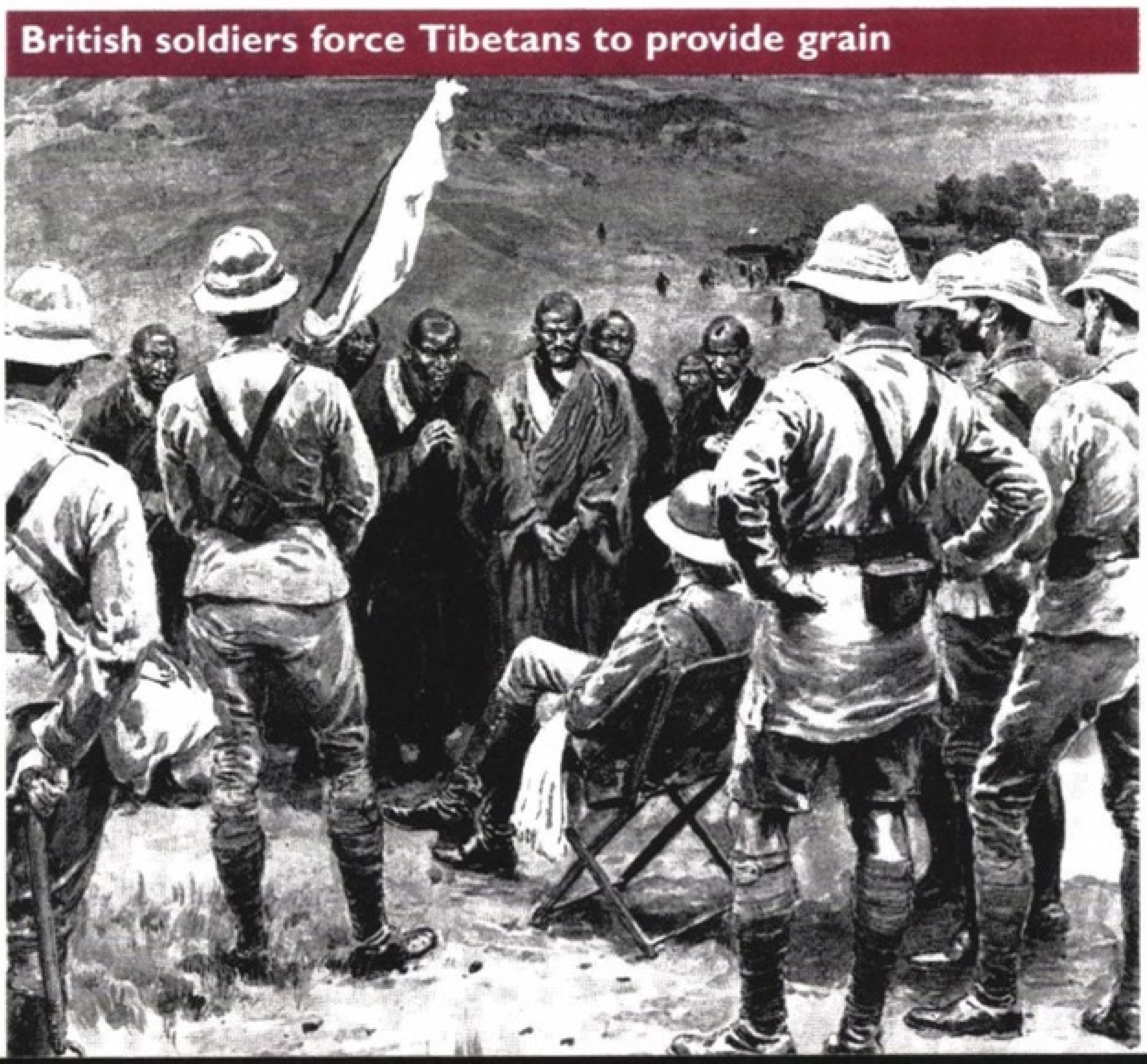
Covetous glances and murder mysteries

But by the mid-seventeeth century Mongol power was on the wane and the new Manchu or Qing Dynasty in China began to cast covetous glances in Tibet's direction. When the Great Fifth Dalai Lama died in 1682 there were fears that the Chinese would seize the chance to invade. Amazingly, his death was kept secret for 15 years as an impersonator was put in his place. Unfortunately when the new Dalai Lama was found and enthroned his main interests were sex, wine and love poetry. In 1720 a 2,000-strong Chinese garrison was placed in Lhasa, putting an intolerable strain on the capital's food supplies and the following year Chinese Emperor K'an Hsi pronounced that Tibet had always been a vassal of China. Few Tibetans took any notice. But Chinese influence grew all the same by backing the Regent – the power behind the throne made necessary due to the time-lag between a Dalai Lama's dying, being reborn and reaching adulthood. Three of the next five Dalai Lamas died in childhood and were probably murdered – and the other two took no interest in politics.

Great games and betrayals

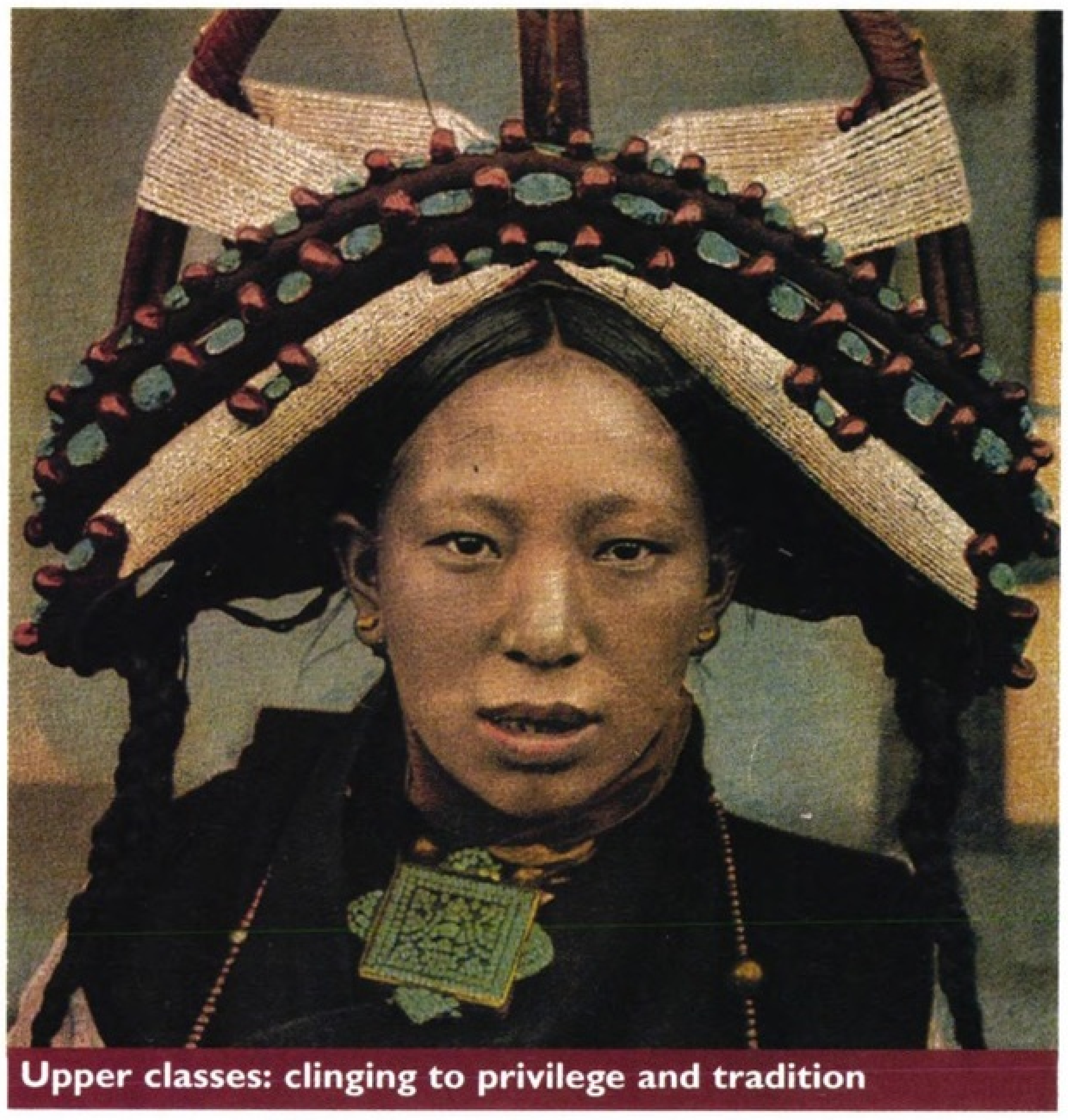
By the late nineteenth century Afghanistan, northern India and Tibet had become the setting of the Great Game, an imperialist power struggle. The British ruled India and were convinced that the Russians intended to gain regional influence by invading Tibet. In 1904 the British consolidated their position by themselves invading Tibet. The British military expedition, headed by Colonel Younghusband, met with resistance from the small Tibetan army. Two hundred British soldiers and several times that number of Tibetans died before Tibet signed a treaty, promising it would prevent other foreign powers from influencing its internal affairs and would trade with British India. When Chinese troops entered Lhasa six years later, the Dalai Lama appealed to the British to help expel them. To his surprise the British refused. Luckily the corrupt Chinese empire was in its death throes and fell to Nationalists in 1911. Tibetans seized the chance to throw out the invaders. In June 1912 the Dalai Lama proclaimed Tibetan independence.

British soldiers force Tibetans to provide grain



Feudal foibles and leisured splendour

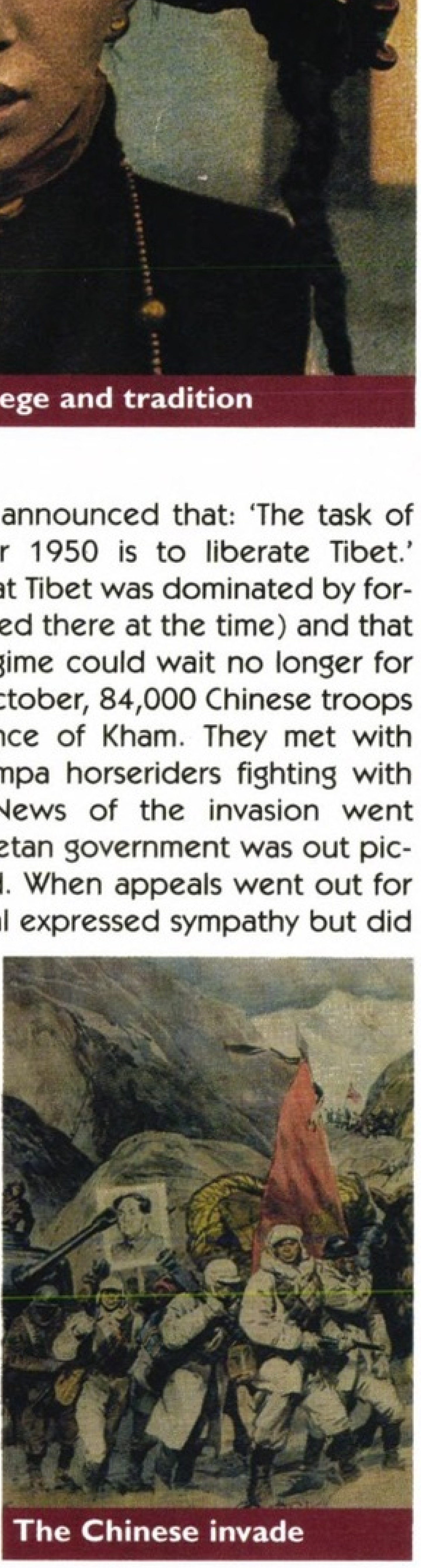
Tibet may have entered the twentieth century but its people were living in conditions that had more in common with medieval times in Europe. Feudal landowners and powerful monasteries held sway in most of the country and peasants had to pay them the equivalent of tithes. Secular education did not exist. The Thirteenth Dalai Lama was virtually alone in his realization that for Tibet to survive in the modern world changes would have to be made. He tried to reform land ownership, the legal and penal system, the civil service and education. He also tried to establish a modern Tibetan army. But time and again his initiatives were blocked by powerful traditionalists, both religious and secular. He died before seeing the dreadful outcome of this rigidity. The leisured splendour of the secular élite looked to the outside world for some things – Lhasa shops sold Scotch whisky and Elizabeth Arden cosmetics – but there were still no diplomatic relations with foreign countries. When Communists came to power in China in 1949 only a handful of Tibetans had any idea what this might mean for their country.



Upper classes: clinging to privilege and tradition

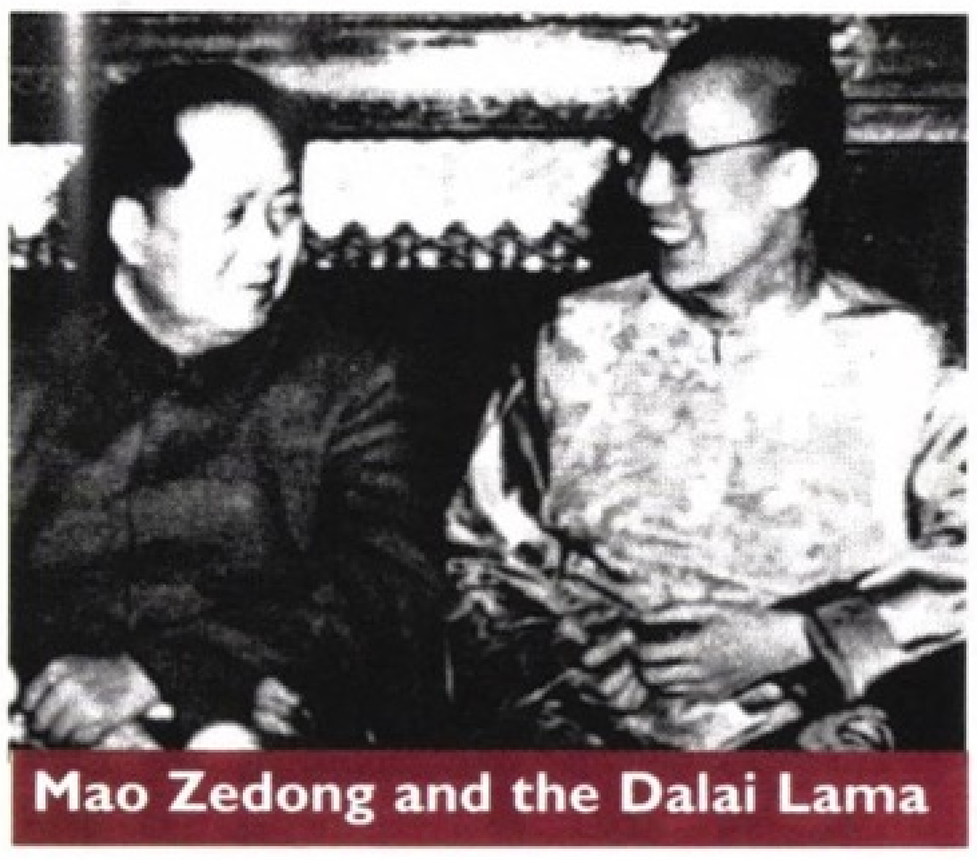
Isolation and invasion

On 1 January 1950 Radio Beijing announced that: 'The task of the People's Liberation Army for 1950 is to liberate Tibet.' Chinese propaganda explained that Tibet was dominated by foreign imperialists (six Westerners lived there at the time) and that the Tibetan victims of a feudal regime could wait no longer for their 'peaceful liberation'. On 7 October, 84,000 Chinese troops penetrated Tibet's eastern province of Kham. They met with unexpected resistance from Khampa horseriders fighting with swords against Chinese guns. News of the invasion went unheeded in Lhasa: the entire Tibetan government was out picnicking when the telegram arrived. When appeals went out for international help, India and Nepal expressed sympathy but did nothing and Britain called for adjournment of the UN debate on the invasion. On 17 November 1950 15-year-old Tenzin Gyatso was prematurely given full powers to rule as Fourteenth Dalai Lama. In 1951 the Chinese presented him with an 'agreement' promising that neither Tibet's social system nor its religion would be changed but that Tibetans would 'return to the big family of the Motherland, the People's Republic of China'. Without international support he had no choice but to sign.



The Chinese invade

Uprising and crackdown



Mao Zedong and the Dalai Lama

TIBET IMAGE BANK

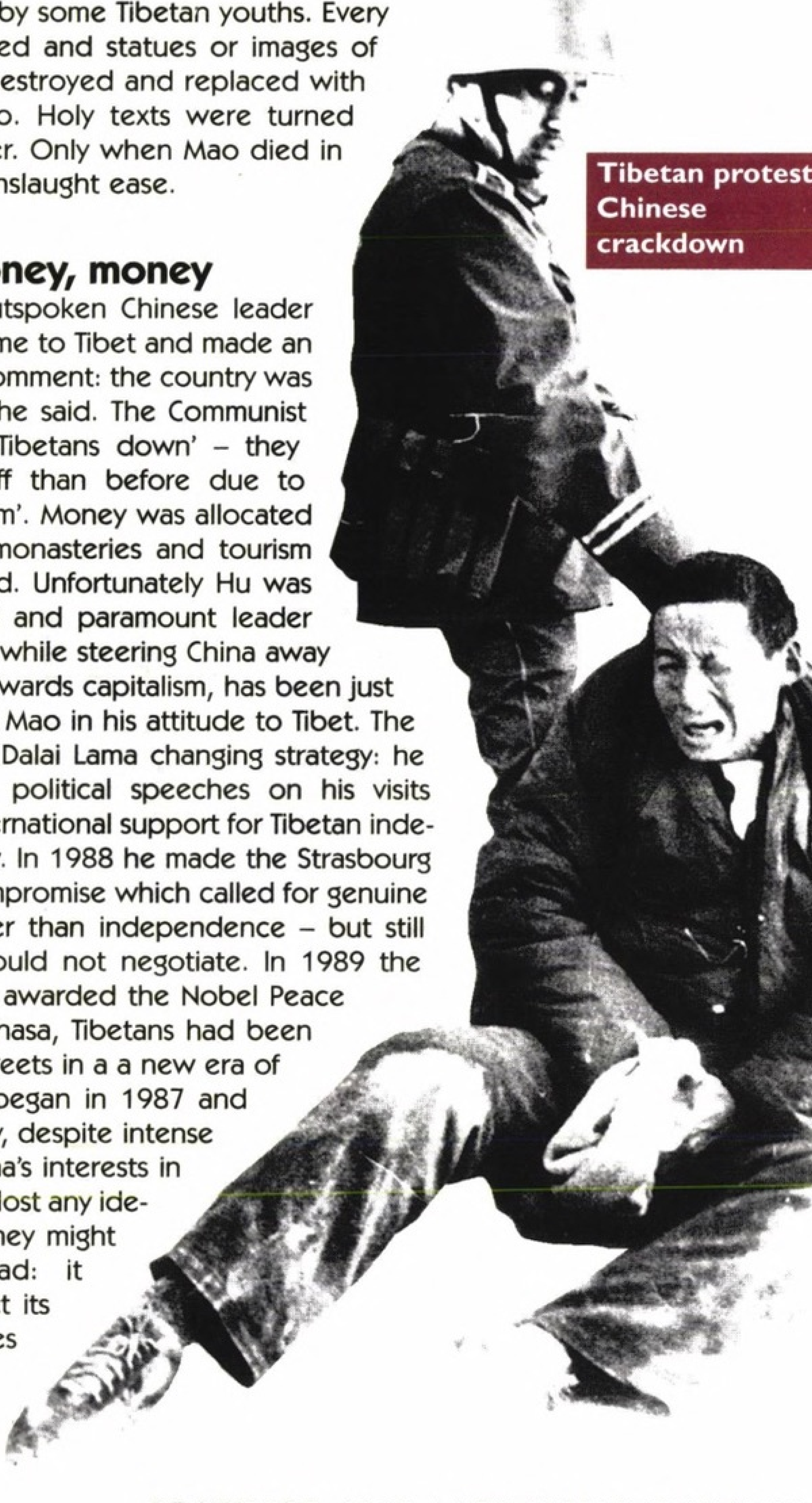
The Chinese believed the Tibetan masses would embrace the benefits of communism. But although standards of living were low, no-one went hungry and the traditional ruling powers were paternalistic rather than brutal. In 1953 Mao Zedong promised the Dalai Lama the Chinese would leave Tibet once 'liberation' was complete. Instead persecution by the Chinese led hundreds to head for the mountains to join the guerrilla organization *Chushi Gangdrug* ('Four Rivers, Six Ranges'). In March 1959 Tibetan resistance exploded. Fearing a Chinese plot to kidnap him, the Dalai Lama went into exile in India. The Chinese cracked down hard. Chinese figures record 87,000 deaths while Tibetan sources suggest as many as 430,000 were killed in the Uprising and subsequent years of guerrilla warfare. Large-scale and systematic Chinese brutality began, involving an arsenal of torture and humiliation methods. Peasants and nomads lost freedom of movement and were ordered into communes. Tens of thousands of Tibetans starved to death between 1959 and 1961 in the famines that followed Mao's disastrous Great Leap Forward.

The darkest years

In 1966 Mao Zedong launched the 'Cultural Revolution' – and the decade that followed was to be Tibet's darkest. Threatened by the opposition he felt growing within his Party, Mao turned to China's youth and ordered them to eradicate the 'the four olds' (old ideas, old culture, old customs, old habits). Red Guards, most in their teens, went on the rampage, righteously intimidating, beating and killing 'reactionaries', 'class enemies' and 'spies'. In Tibet it meant full-scale war on a people and a civilization. Thousands of monasteries were looted and razed. Tens of thousands of Tibetans, lay and ordained, were persecuted and sent to labour camps. Red Guards poured into Lhasa from China, to be joined on their rampages by some Tibetan youths. Every home was raided and statues or images of Buddha were destroyed and replaced with pictures of Mao. Holy texts were turned into toilet paper. Only when Mao died in 1976 did the onslaught ease.

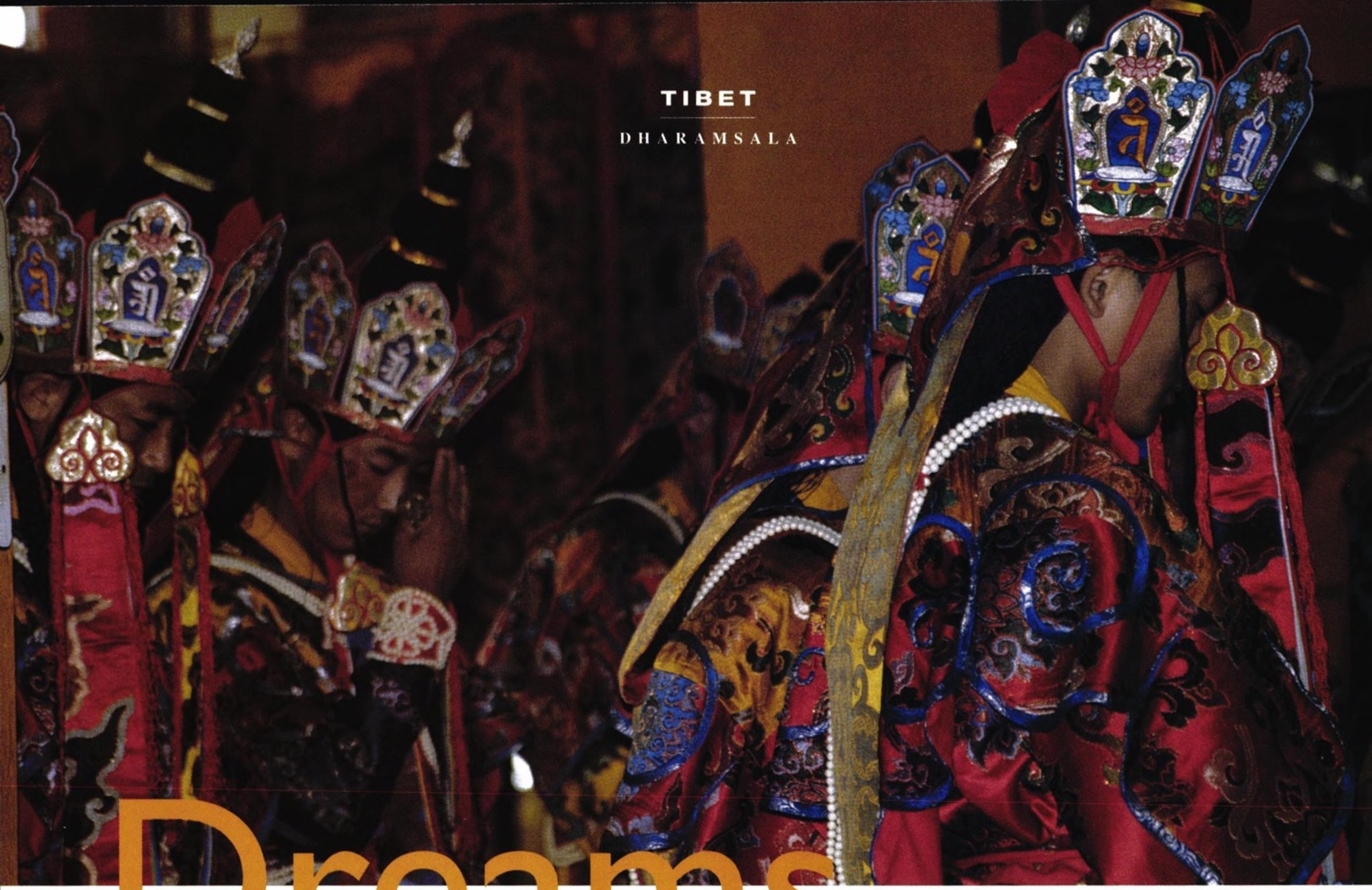
Money, money, money

In 1980 the outspoken Chinese leader Hu Yaobang came to Tibet and made an extraordinary comment: the country was in a shambles, he said. The Communist Party had 'let Tibetans down' – they were worse off than before due to 'plain colonialism'. Money was allocated for rebuilding monasteries and tourism was encouraged. Unfortunately Hu was soon disgraced and paramount leader Deng Xiaoping, while steering China away from Maoism towards capitalism, has been just as repressive as Mao in his attitude to Tibet. The 1980s saw the Dalai Lama changing strategy: he started making political speeches on his visits abroad and international support for Tibetan independence grew. In 1988 he made the Strasbourg proposal, a compromise which called for genuine autonomy rather than independence – but still the Chinese would not negotiate. In 1989 the Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Back in Lhasa, Tibetans had been taking to the streets in a a new era of protest which began in 1987 and continues today, despite intense repression. China's interests in Tibet have now lost any ideological tinge they might once have had: it wants to extract its natural resources and to inject Chinese colonists.



Tibetan protest, Chinese crackdown

TIBET IMAGE BANK



VANESSA BAIRD

Dreams, schemes and prayer wheels

Dharamsala, also known as Little Lhasa. It's the place Tibetan refugees dream of, and the home of the exiled Dalai Lama.

CLINGING PRECARIOUSLY to the Himalayan foothills, amid woods and waterfalls, is the once-tiny settlement of McLeod Ganj. Now the old British hill-station above the Indian town of Dharamsala is the sprawling home to around 20,000 Tibetan exiles. About a third of the way down the hill is the compound of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile.

As far as the Indian Government is concerned none of this exists. The Indian policy is, as one senior Tibetan official told me, to 'keep one eye open and one eye closed'. India does not want to harm its relations with China. But it has also helped the Tibetans far more than any other country.

The first wish of all refugees arriving in Dharamsala is to see the Dalai Lama and receive his blessing. Then they concern themselves with the more mundane things, like food and shelter. Kalsang Yulgial, who runs the refugee reception centre, is a large friendly man who has a picture of the Dalai Lama meeting John Major hanging on his wall. I try not to hold this against him.

Kalsang's job is not an easy one. The refugees arrive full of expectations. Many want to stay in McLeod Ganj and be near to the Dalai Lama. But the place is bursting at the seams. The Tibetan Children's Village has 2,000 students – about twice as many as it should. There is room for only 120 people at the refugee reception centre. And the Indian Government is now putting pressure on Dharamsala not to accept any more refugees. The Dalai Lama would also like Tibetans to stay in Tibet. By leaving the country in droves they are playing into the hands of the Chinese, he says.

'Some have just come for an audience with His Holiness or to visit their children in the school. That's fine, they will go back to Tibet again afterwards. But with the others it's more difficult. We have to explain the situation to them carefully,' says Kalsang.

The authorities are now allowing people to stay for a year or so – during which time they receive teaching on Tibetan culture and identity. They are told that the best way they can contribute to Tibet's struggle is to return.

There is a certain logic in this. But don't exiles who have made a hellish, life-risking journey, resent it when comfortably settled people in Dharamsala tell them they should go back?

'The Dalai Lama talks to them and usually they understand. Nobody is ever returned by force and political prisoners and torture victims are automatically allowed to stay,' says Kalsang.

Jamyang Senge, for example, could never return. For 15 years he was a political prisoner, for 10 years after that a slave. He starts by telling me, through an interpreter, that he has never been interviewed in this way before: 'Sitting on a chair, facing you, answering your questions. I am more accustomed to answering questions on my knees, with my hands tied behind my back and with kicks to my head and body.'

He was a young man when taken prisoner by the Chinese. 'They arrested me because my father and my brother were in the Four Rivers, Six Ranges resistance movement. I was kept in prison for 15 years from 1959 to 1974.

'During interrogation I was beaten up and left without food. The Chinese would try to brainwash us. I was forced to denounce my faith in Buddhism and in the Dalai Lama. But this was lipservice – it did not come from the heart. His Holiness remained my main source of inspiration during these years. They always asked the same questions. After 15 years of this I was released from prison and forced to do unpaid labour. The labour camp was in Mynak near the border with China. There was never enough food. I survived by stealing whatever we were growing.

'When I was finally released, I was in bad shape. I was not able to sleep. My arms were very weak from being tied up so much of the time and having had so little food. A loud bang or a vehicle horn was enough to suddenly fill me with fear.

'All I wanted to do was to leave Tibet. But my wife thought that if we tried to escape we would get caught. Then this summer we decided to go on a pilgrimage to Lhasa with our 13-year-old son. From there we went on to the sacred Mount Kailas. This took us quite close to the border and we joined a group of people who were planning to escape.'

After the interview we go downstairs to meet his wife, whom I immediately recognize as Rinchen Dolma, the girlish 60-year-old who was lying under a tree in the Kathmandu reception centre. She remembers me too. She's happy. She and Jamyang are going to stay here in Dharamsala – a long, long nightmare for both of them is over. Jamyang's anxiety attacks have left him since he had an audience with the Dalai Lama. 'I feel safe, all these fears have gone.'

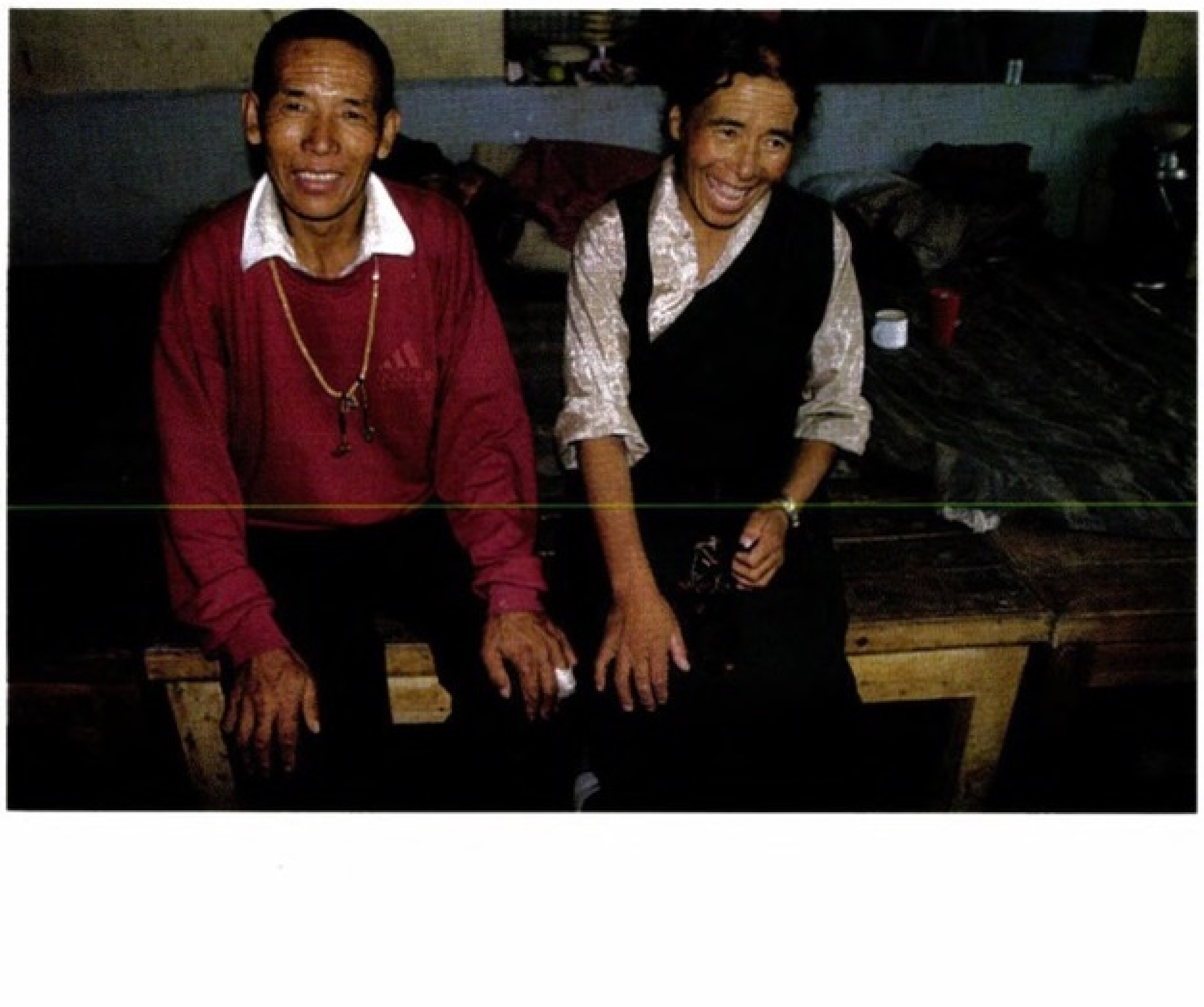
I hear that there are plenty of people in Dharamsala with serious psychological problems

This is a common line, the usual answer to my questions about psychological problems experienced by torture survivors. 'Tibetans don't seem to suffer from these problems so much,' I am told. 'It's to do with our religion.'

I ask a nun who is suffering from depression, for instance, how she feels towards the Chinese who tortured her. Without hesitation she says proudly, 'Nothing'. Did you ever feel anything? 'No, never; nothing.'

Is this where the Buddhist meditation on 'turning your mind into a piece of wood' comes in handy? Or is it a straightforward case of what Western therapy would see as 'denial' of anger, a typical cause of depression? I hear that there are plenty of people in Dharamsala with serious psychological problems: people who feel isolated, suicidal or uncontrollably aggressive after years of abuse by Chinese torturers. The problem is beginning to be recognized. With the help of the Danish agency Danida, the Tibetan Health Department is starting a new programme for survivors of torture.

Finding safety and happiness at last. Ex-prisoners Jamyang Senge and Rinchen Dolma in Dharamsala.



VANESSA BAIRD

Then there is the complex issue of 'bad karma'. The religious explanation usually given for Tibet's plight today is that Tibetans are being punished collectively for sins committed in previous lives. But does this mean that Tibetans still deserve all they are getting – 45 years on? Are not the Chinese obviously to blame for human-rights abuses and the like?

'Well,' explains one official, 'if we try to blame other people for our problems the problems will just get larger. Religious teaching helps us make the problems smaller.'

But, I insist, are the Chinese not to blame?

'Politically they are,' he says, 'but if you dig deep into religion whatever we suffer is because of our past deeds. Perhaps because we did not listen to the previous Dalai Lama when he was trying to reform Tibet.'

I'm feeling very uneasy about this. It sounds a bit too much like papal infallibility to me. Must the Dalai Lama be obeyed even if he has got it wrong? And if so, what does this make of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile's claims that it is dedicated to creating a Western-style multi-party democracy?

I put this to the Speaker of Parliament, the Venerable Samdhong Rinpoche. He's one of the Administration's leading intellectuals and himself an incarnate lama.

Do you ever disagree with the Dalai Lama?

'Oh yes,' he says. 'We agree to disagree. He's a very democratic person. He never likes to impose his ideas – except for his insistence on democracy. When we [the *Kashag* or Cabinet] disagree with him he agrees with us.'

This sounds all right to me. But he then goes on to say: 'This has led us to make many wrong decisions. Now we disagree with His Holiness in order to appear democratic. But in our hearts we agree.'

This does not sound much like genuine democracy in action to me.

'No,' he admits with a wise old smile. 'But he thinks very rationally and his judgement is very solid. Our collective wisdom is much less than his.'

Can he give me an example of when he disagreed with the Dalai Lama and was proved wrong? He cites the Strasbourg Proposal in which the Dalai Lama suggested that the Chinese allow Tibet self-rule, while retaining control over defence and foreign policy. Samdhong Rinpoche now thinks this was a brilliant move because it called China's bluff. The Chinese had up to then said they were prepared to negotiate on anything but independence. Yet here they were, still refusing to talk and proving to the world that they had no intention of reaching a settlement.

I'm thinking it's really time to talk to the man himself. ■

The man himself

He's funny, he's warm – and he's also a god-king. A meeting with the Dalai Lama...

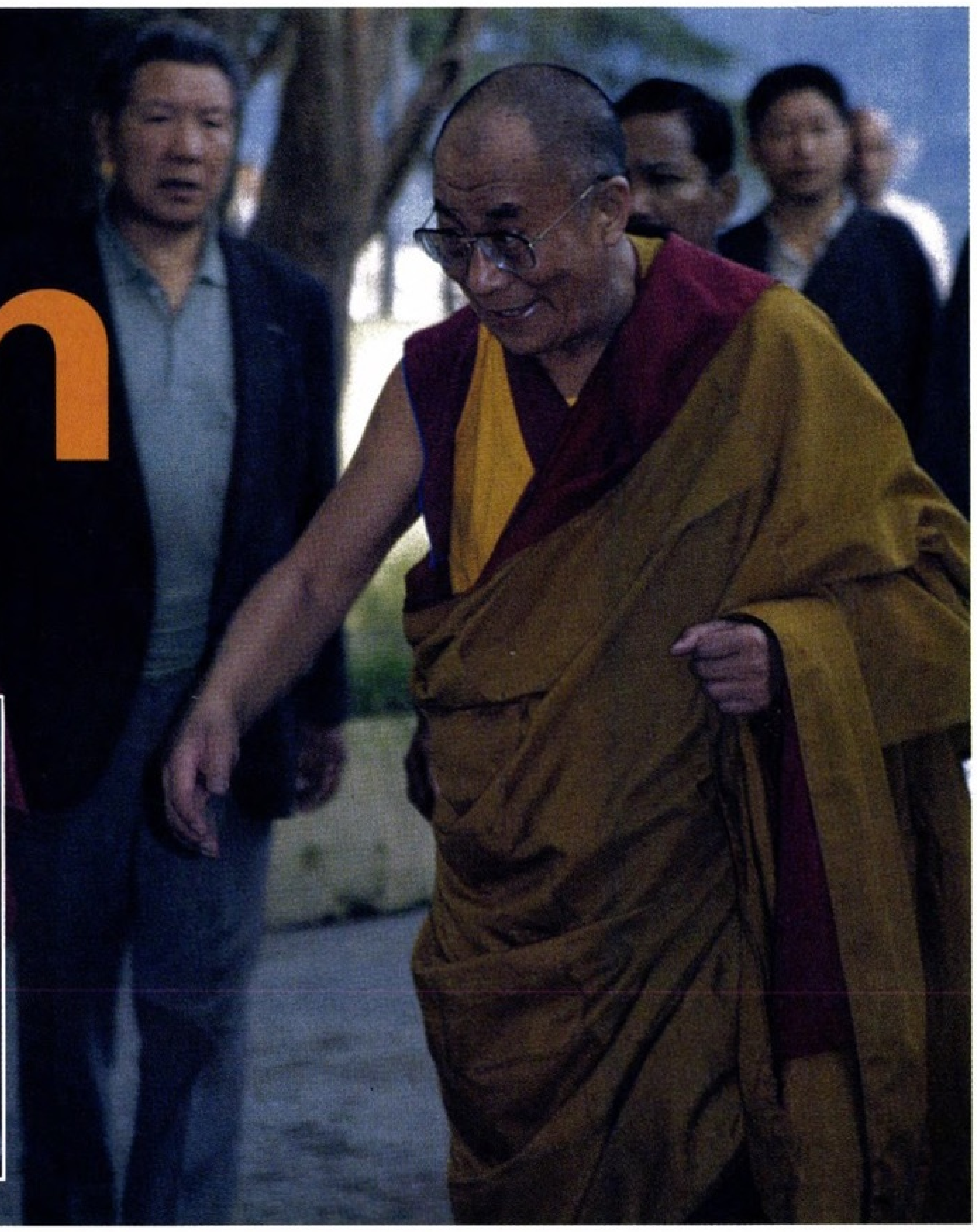


PHOTO LEFT: RAGHU RAI / MAGNUM; RIGHT: VANESSA BAIRD

Little Tenzin Gyatso was just three years old when he was recognized as the incarnation of Chenrezi – the Buddhist god of compassion – and the next Dalai Lama.

Son of simple farmers from the north-eastern village of Pari Takster, he was brought to Lhasa with his family but had to live apart from them in the Potala Palace. It was, for a young child (pictured above), something of a 'golden prison'. For five months each year he had to stay in a musty room, reciting religious mantras, under the gaze of his stern-faced tutor and Regent. From his window, or sometimes through his telescope on the roof of the Potala, he would view the world outside, and watch 'the cowherds coming home looking happy and carefree. Little did they know,' he recalls, 'how much the Dalai Lama would have liked to be with them!'

Today he lives much closer to the people, in a modest house, and takes care to make himself accessible.

In the waiting room his private secretary looks at my questions – and suggests some changes. 'It's not to make them less provocative. He likes provocative questions. But he gets bored if he's asked questions he's been asked before and you won't get such a good answer.'

We go in. He seems tall but otherwise it's exactly as I expect. He has a big warm smile and an extraordinary ability to make one feel at ease in his presence. It's more like meeting an old friend than a revered leader, let alone someone who has been worshipped as a god-king since early childhood. He also has a most infectious sense of humour and can reduce a room full of people to wild laughter with the ease of an accomplished comedian. I start with an inevitable and definitely serious question.

Do you think that your policy of non-violent resistance is working?

I think so. We have worldwide sympathy and support because of our non-violent approach. If we engaged in violence we would get more publicity, of course, but this might not increase sympathy or support in the long run. One significant result of the non-violent approach is that Chinese intellectuals not only outside but also inside China are showing more understanding of the Tibetan issue. In the long term the most important thing is for China and Tibet to live peacefully as neighbours. To achieve this we must carry out this freedom struggle non-violently.

Aren't Tibetans running out of patience? Don't some of them want a more confrontational approach?

If my non-violent approach does not bring about a constructive result and the situation remains as it is then these feelings will grow, especially among the younger Tibetans.

Don't you feel that time is running out?

Yes, it is running out. The Chinese population in Tibet is increasing day by day. Whether intentionally or unintentionally some kind of cultural genocide is talking place.

Do you think there is a danger of a Tiananmen Square situation occurring in Tibet?

Potentially it's there. There is a potential for bloodshed and the danger of some violent eruption is recognized.

Can the international community do anything to help avert this?

It can help by supporting the negotiations we are driving at. Mine is a 'middle way' approach. I am not insisting on total independence, just some kind of genuine self-rule.

What do you say to critics who say that you can't compromise on independence in this way?

[Long pause] Historically we have the right to independence! But my main concern is to preserve Tibetan culture. Tibetan culture has the potential to create a better, more peaceful society. Tibet is in a strategically important position between India and China and making it a 'zone of peace' will help guarantee peace between those two countries. So preserving Tibetan culture will benefit not only six million Tibetans but millions of Chinese and Indians!

In order to make Tibet a genuine 'zone of peace' the most important thing is human compassion. You can't do it if there is hatred and anger. The political status of independence is, I feel, less important than this. Political independence without peace – with civil war, for example, like in some of the African states – is no use.

Let the critics say what they will! It's one thing to be able to speak forcefully about the right to independence of Tibetan people but it is another to thing to be able actually to do something under the existing circumstances. It's not enough just to repeat 'We are an independent nation, we are an independent nation'. We have to do something to save our nation and to save our culture.

The Chinese have so far rejected all your initiatives. There's a deadlock in negotiations. What is your next step going to be?

[Laughs] Up to now we have been seeking greater international support. At the moment the Chinese leadership is in a process of transition. This current situation will not continue for much longer – perhaps a few months or one year. And then I think things may improve.

If China disintegrates as the USSR did will the Tibetan Government-in-Exile be ready to push forward its own independence agenda?

If China falls apart there may be bloodshed. So I hope it does not work in this way and that the changes are evolutionary. I think the people in China who are prepared to do anything to cling onto power are only temporary. A more democratic atmosphere must come. People who are genuinely using human intelligence must come to the top and I am hoping we will achieve some kind of meaningful dialogue and a mutually agreeable solution. Apart from that I have no other plans. I certainly have no plans to acquire weapons or anything like that!

Some people have said your stance over the discovery of the new Panchen Lama was very confrontational towards the Chinese. Was this your intention?

My priority was that the reincarnation should be genuine. Right from the beginning of the search I tried to communicate with the Chinese Government but they did not respond. In the meantime Tibetans were urging me to decide the new Panchen Lama. I could have waited and let the Chinese decide. This would have been less problematic and more peaceful in the short run. But how could I then have convinced the Tibetan people that this was the genuine Panchen Lama? In the long run the view of the Tibetan people was more important.

Your plans for Tibet involve establishing a Western-style democracy. Up to now you have played a very central and prominent part. How easy will it be for you to take a back seat?

My main wish is for a genuine stable democracy to be established. There are bound to be problems at the beginning. I hope that these problems appear within the next 20 years so that I am still around to do something to help solve them. That is my main objective.

Many years ago you said you might be the last Dalai Lama. Do you still think that today?

I think the majority of Tibetans still want a [ruling] Dalai Lama. But maybe after 20 or 30 years, when there is a stable democracy, people will feel it is no longer necessary. That does not mean my life is discontinued. My life stays and there will be a continuation of rebirth.

Is a female Dalai Lama possible?

Oh yes! Why not!

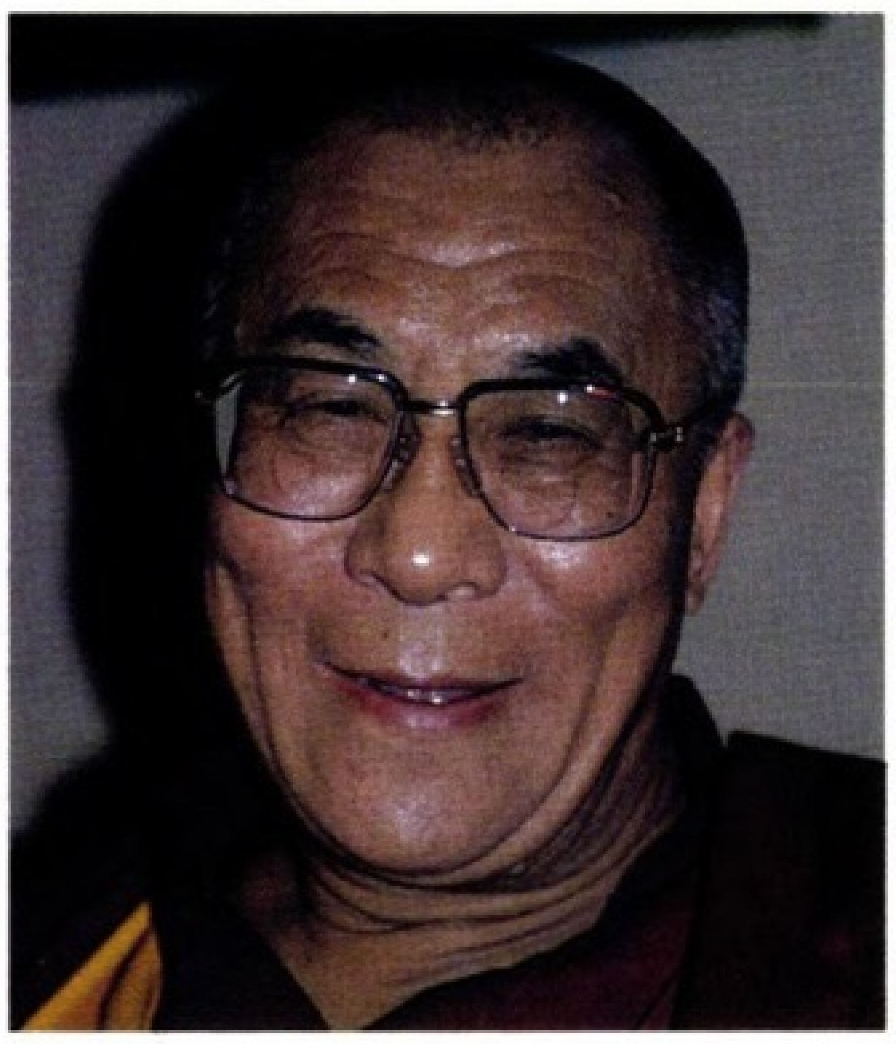
You have travelled extensively and have met with many heads of state. They have expressed plenty of sympathy for the cause of Tibet but this hasn't really translated into effective pressure on China. How does this make you feel?

I think this is normal. There is no reason to lose our determination now. You know, even during the Cultural Revolution Tibetans kept their hope. We were isolated. There was hardly any support from the outside world. But now I think our situation is much healthier. The international community is much more aware and much more supportive. So today although the situation inside the country is very grave, I think it is much more hopeful than before.

You have just turned sixty. What is your mood as you enter this stage in your life?

Sixty is nothing special! People here in India consider the sixtieth birthday special, but that's a Hindu tradition, not a Buddhist one. For a Buddhist the day of death is more important than the day of birth. It's only then that you know whether that person has done good or bad and whether their life is worth celebrating or not! Anyway, for me the morning of every day is a birthday. The important thing is that the day should be useful, should be meaningful! ■

The **Dalai Lama's** initiatives


VANESSA BAIRD

THE FIVE-POINT PEACE PLAN

1. Transformation of the whole of Tibet into a zone of peace. Withdrawal of Chinese troops and military installations.

2. Abandonment of China's population-transfer policy which threatens the very existence of the Tibetans as a people.

3. Respect for the Tibetan people's fundamental human rights and democratic freedom.

4. Restoration and protection of Tibet's natural environment and abandonment of China's use of Tibet for the production of nuclear weapons and dumping of nuclear waste.

5. Commencement of earnest negotiations on the future status of Tibet and of relations between the Tibetan and Chinese people.

(Proposed to the US Congress in 1987)

THE STRASBOURG PROPOSAL

◆ The whole of Tibet (U-Tsang, Kham and Amdo) would become a self-governing democracy.

◆ China could remain responsible for Tibet's foreign policy.

◆ The Government of Tibet would be democratic and committed to economic equality, social justice and protection for the environment. It would adhere fully to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

(Proposed to the European Parliament in 1988; officially withdrawn in 1992 due to lack of Chinese response and criticism from within the Tibetan exile community).

How to free Tibet? Views differ but these *thangka* painters have their own way of defying cultural genocide.

PHOTO: RAGHU RAI / MAGNUM

Exit the dragon

Is dissent in the exile community a sign of nascent democracy or disintegration? Is Tibet on the brink of a bloody intifada? Above all, what can be done to help?

'WE ARE ALL school dropouts,' says Jamyang Norbu cheerfully. 'None of us has a degree.' That's strange. The small band of people who have set up this cultural institute, Amnye Machen, have been described to me as the 'intellectual cream' of the exile community in Dharamsala.

But the government information officer who conferred this praise went on to say: 'Unfortunately they have been printing reports critical of the Government-in-Exile. This demoralizes Tibetans in Tibet. It's playing into the hands of the Chinese.'

Some ultra-conservative religious leaders have gone so far as to accuse Amnye Machen of working for the Chinese. Jamyang Norbu has himself received death threats.

He's an energetic and loquacious man, clearly more inclined to speak his mind than to be cautious. Above his desk is a picture of exiled Chinese dissident Harry Wu, himself a supporter of the Tibetan cause.

Jamyang Norbu *is* critical. He thinks religion is still too influential in Tibetan society and is holding back the struggle for independence. It would be better, he says, if the Tibeṭan Administration directed its energies towards studying China. 'They don't know the nature of this enemy. This enemy does not respond to compassion.'

More controversial yet, he is critical of the Dalai Lama's unwavering commitment to non-violence. 'All the options have to be looked at,' he says. He is not advocating violence but he does point out that those who have used it – like the PLO – get taken seriously by the international community.

Such views have prompted foreign journalists to cast Amyne Machen as 'the opposition' to the Government-in-Exile. 'That's a very Western view of politics,' says Jamyang. What Amnye Machen is doing, he says, is not opposing but providing another perspective which is at times critical.

In one major respect Amnye Machen's goal is identical to the Dalai Lama's – they want to keep Tibetan culture alive. They publish books by Tibetan writers in Tibetan. But they also think that one way of keeping Tibetan culture alive is to keep it fed with foreign ideas, so they have translated into Tibetan for the first time the works of George Orwell, Vaclav Havel and others.

Kharma Samden, a Tibetan Youth Congress member, has similar feelings of frustration with the current leadership. 'It's very traditional,' he says. 'The democratic structures may be in place but it is very difficult to criticize openly. People take it so personally. I am not saying get rid of tradition – but it has to be combined with a modern education and a sense of what is going on in the world.'

Intimations of intifada

What is going on in China is the key to Tibet's future. Beijing is losing its grip on its provinces. The economic disparity between the rich coastal areas and the poor inland areas is throwing up all sorts of problems. Farmers are leaving the countryside and moving to the cities. Unemployment is high and there are fears of insurrection.

Tibetans in exile hope that China will disintegrate *à la* Soviet Union. New leaders in Beijing, they reason, will make negotiations easier. Maybe. And then again, maybe not. A fair deal for Tibet may not feature at all on their list of priorities, although Tibetans in exile have been forging links with exiled Chinese dissenters such as Jan Jiaqi, who leads the Federation for a Democratic China.

Meanwhile, according to one of the foremost experts on Tibet, US historian Melvyn Goldstein, the situation in Tibet right now is dangerously volatile. A decline into violence is, he says, a 'realistic assumption'.

'China's policy in Tibet is in shambles,' he says. Bringing the free market to Tibet was supposed to create 'modern' Tibetans who would abandon hopes of independence in favour of making money. But they have not materialized. This is because the core problem – of massive Chinese migration – is not being addressed. 'Tibetans are unlikely to stand on the sidelines for much longer watching Beijing transform the demography and economy of their homeland with impunity,' says Goldstein.

He goes on to warn: 'Nationalistic emotions coupled with desperation and anger make a powerful brew. And there are Tibetans inside and outside Tibet who are intoxicated with the idea of beginning such a campaign focused on violence – in their view a "war of conscience", a Tibetan-style intifada.' With this in mind arms dealers are already moving in to try to supply Tibetans, according to Robbie Barnett of the Tibetan Information Network.

'The future lies with Tibetans in Tibet – not those in exile'

What if violence does erupt? If Tibetans had recourse to serious violence – as they did in 1959 – this would most likely provoke a heavy-handed Chinese response along the lines of the Tiananmen Square massacre. If the violence spilled outside Tibet this could impact on the internal stability of China itself. One of Beijing's worst-case scenarios is for serious disturbances in Tibet to spread to other minority areas such as Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia and the Muslim (Hui) areas in Gansu. This might help Tibet – but it might equally lead to an even tighter clampdown.

According to Goldstein the Tibetan leadership has three options: it can carry on campaigning for international support and wait in the hope that China disintegrates; it can encourage or organize violent opposition in Tibet, maybe forcing China to adopt a more conciliatory line; or it can compromise by sending Beijing a clear message that the Dalia Lama is prepared to scale down even further his political demands in order to preserve the ethnically homogenous Tibetan homeland.

Goldstein says that a possible compromise would leave the Chinese in control but would appoint Tibetans to all positions of power in Tibet, make Tibetan the official language and reduce the number of Chinese migrants.

It's hard to imagine either side agreeing to this. The Chinese have nothing to gain by it. And the Tibetans would find it hard to accept something that falls so far short of independence.

Paper tigers

One of the problems facing those trying to resolve 'the Tibet issue' is that the status quo actually suits the international community very nicely. As long as Tibetans can be encouraged to maintain their non-violent stance and there is not much blood being openly spilled on the streets of Lhasa then governments can go on trading with China without too much protest from their own people.

Governments occasionally do their duty by mentioning human rights and China duly has a fit of pique but does nothing to change its ways. And that is that. It's by now a well-known ritual that does nothing to put in jeopardy trade links and access to the markets of the third-largest economy in the world. Boycotting Chinese goods or imposing trade restrictions could hit China where it hurts. But there is little inclination to do it. No-one really wants to say boo to the dragon too loudly.

The United Nations has been equally ineffectual. In 1959, 1961 and 1965 UN resolutions called for China to 'respect the human rights and freedoms of Tibetans'. Nothing changed. In March 1994 China persuaded the UN for the fourth year running to reject a modestly worded resolution criticizing its human-rights record. In the same year China avoided censure by only one vote at the annual meeting of the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva.

Western legislators have often been ready to criticize China's policy in Tibet: the US Congress has passed many such resolutions, Australia's National Assembly did so in 1990 and the European Parliament has recently been adding an increasingly strong voice of complaint. But the words are not backed up by governmental action.

In 1993, for example, US President Clinton announced he would only renew China's Most Favoured Nation trading status if it cleaned up its human-rights record. At last, said supporters of Tibet. But Clinton turned out to be a paper tiger. A year later China had not improved its record and yet the status was renewed all the same.

Drops in the cup

So what can be done, apart from keeping up the pressure on politicians? Back in London I go and visit Phuntsok Wangyal, founder of the Tibet Foundation. A former resistance fighter who joined up at the age of 14, Phuntsok is well known for his strong views on independence.

But he wears quite a different hat at the Tibet Foundation. This non-political organization is doing things that can be done: small-scale development projects to improve the situation of Tibetans in Tibet, mainly in the areas of health, education, rural small business and pastoralism. To do these things they have to get the approval and co-operation of the Chinese. Is this, I ask, not akin to sleeping with the enemy?

'The Chinese know who I am and my personal views are unchanged. But I must not let that get in the way of working to improve the conditions of Tibetans. We have to deal with the Chinese. That is the reality.'

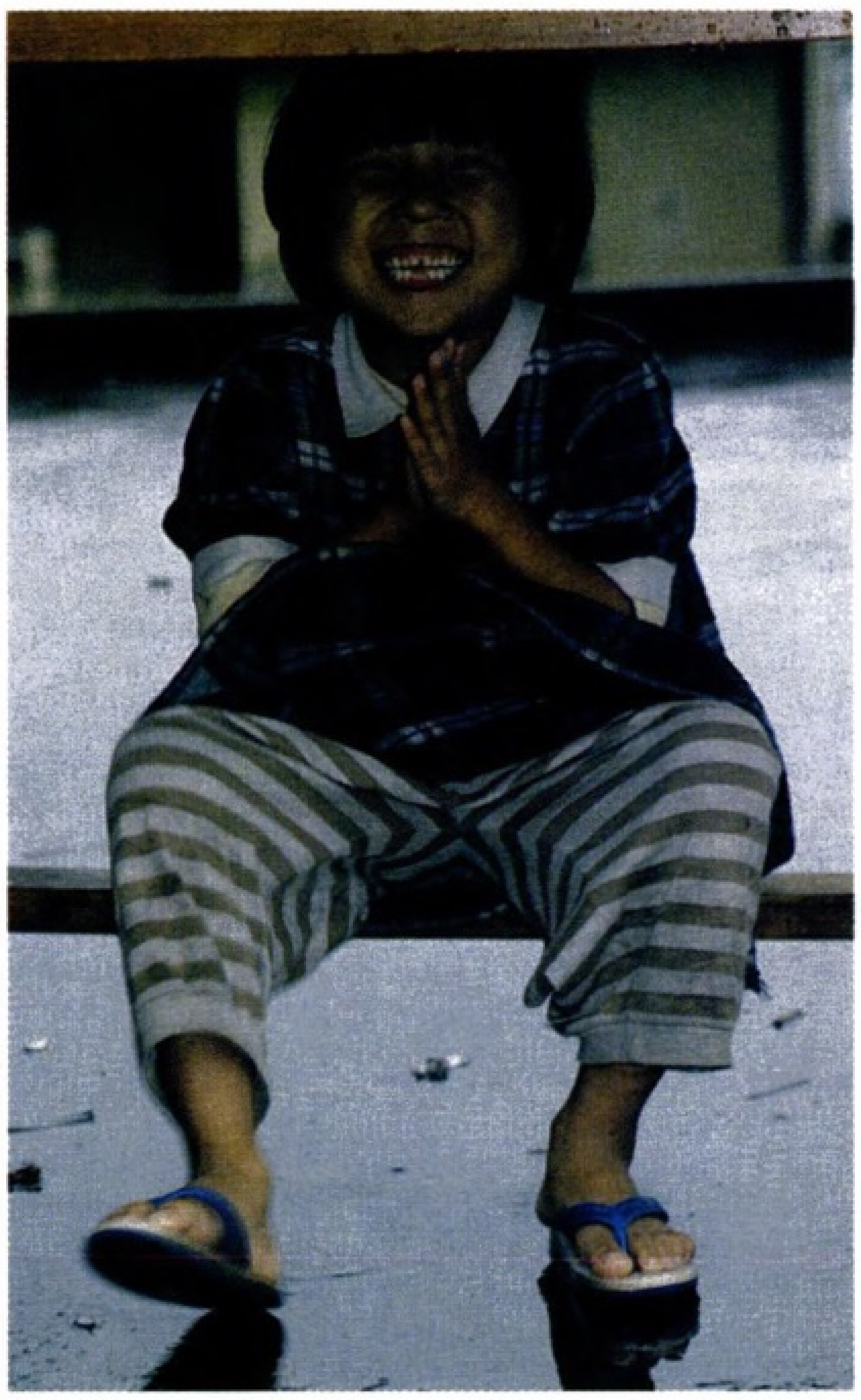
He firmly believes that the future lies with Tibetans inside Tibet, not with the exile community. And so the most important thing is to make sure those Tibetans are getting a good education and adequate healthcare. 'If they have these they will be better able to change the future circumstances of Tibetans.'

Some quite serious compromises have to be made. For example in the rural schools they are setting up for Tibetan children it is the Chinese version of history which has to be taught – the one that says Tibet is a part of China.

'We need not make everything political,' says Phuntsok. 'We must never forget the importance of educating our kids.'

Phuntsok's focused and specific approach is reflected in his views on bigger issues: like how to reach a settlement with China. 'What we need to do is ask ourselves – what is China afraid of? We know that when China is afraid it has to control everything. If we could allay some of those fears then maybe we could start getting somewhere with our negotiations.'

For example, China has always feared that if it did not occupy Tibet then India would. 'If there could be an assurance from India that this is not the case, it might help.'



A wish and a prayer: one of the many second- and third-generation Tibetans born in exile.

VANESSA BAIRD

Another fear is that China is going to run out of half the staple minerals essential to its economic growth within the next decade. 'Perhaps,' says Phuntsok, 'Tibet could commit itself to share some of its resources with China and to use Chinese rather than other foreign expertise to help extract them. This would be a way of protecting some of China's economic interests.'

This sounds like good sense. After all, it is economic rather than ideological interests that are keeping the Chinese in Tibet today. Though reducing Chinese migration to Tibet will be a harder issue to resolve.

On the issue of independence as the ultimate goal, however, Phuntsok remains as firm as ever.

'People have to have some hope – whether they achieve it or not. For example, I am a Buddhist and so enlightenment is my final objective. When I light a butter lamp, do prostrations, chant *om mani padme hum*, I am putting something into the cup that might in the end lead to the cup overflowing and enlightenment. I know that my attainment of enlightenment is unrealistic – yet I do it. It's a lot more unrealistic than the prospect of independence for Tibet. But it is very important to have an objective.'

In the course of researching and writing this issue of **NI**, time and again a wave of despair would wash over me. 'But it's hopeless,' I would say very quietly to myself. Phuntsok's approach is a powerful antidote to such despair. It's this kind of attitude which brought about the collapse of apartheid, the end of colonial rule in India and the restoration of democracy in Eastern Europe.

It's easy to forget just how often 'the impossible' has been achieved by people working in small ways, each adding their drop to the cup. ■

Action

SUPPORT TIBET! GET IN TOUCH WITH ONE – OR MORE – OF THE FOLLOWING GROUPS:

AOTEAROA/ NEW ZEALAND

Friends of Tibet PO Box 66, 002 Beachhaven, Auckland 10. Tel/fax: (09) 483 7275.

AUSTRALIA

Australian Tibet Council PO Box 1236, Potts Point, NSW 2011. Tel: (02) 360 9669. Fax: 360 9057.
Amnesty International PO Box 1611, Broadway, NSW 2007. Tel: (02) 281 4188.

BRITAIN

Tibet Support Group 9 Islington Green, London NI 2XH. Tel: (0171) 359 7573. Fax: 354 1036.
Tibet Foundation 10 Bloomsbury Way, London WC1A 2SH. Tel: (0171) 404 2889 Fax: 404 2366.
ROKPA Trust Foreign Aid Samye Ling Tibetan Centre, Eskdalemuir, Langholm, Dumfriesshire, Scotland. Tel: (013873) 77323. Fax: 73223.

CANADA

Canada Tibet Committee 4675 Coolbrook Avenue, Montreal, Quebec H3X 2K7. Tel: (514) 487 0665. Fax: 487 7825.

CHINA OUT OF TIBET
INDEPEN
FOR

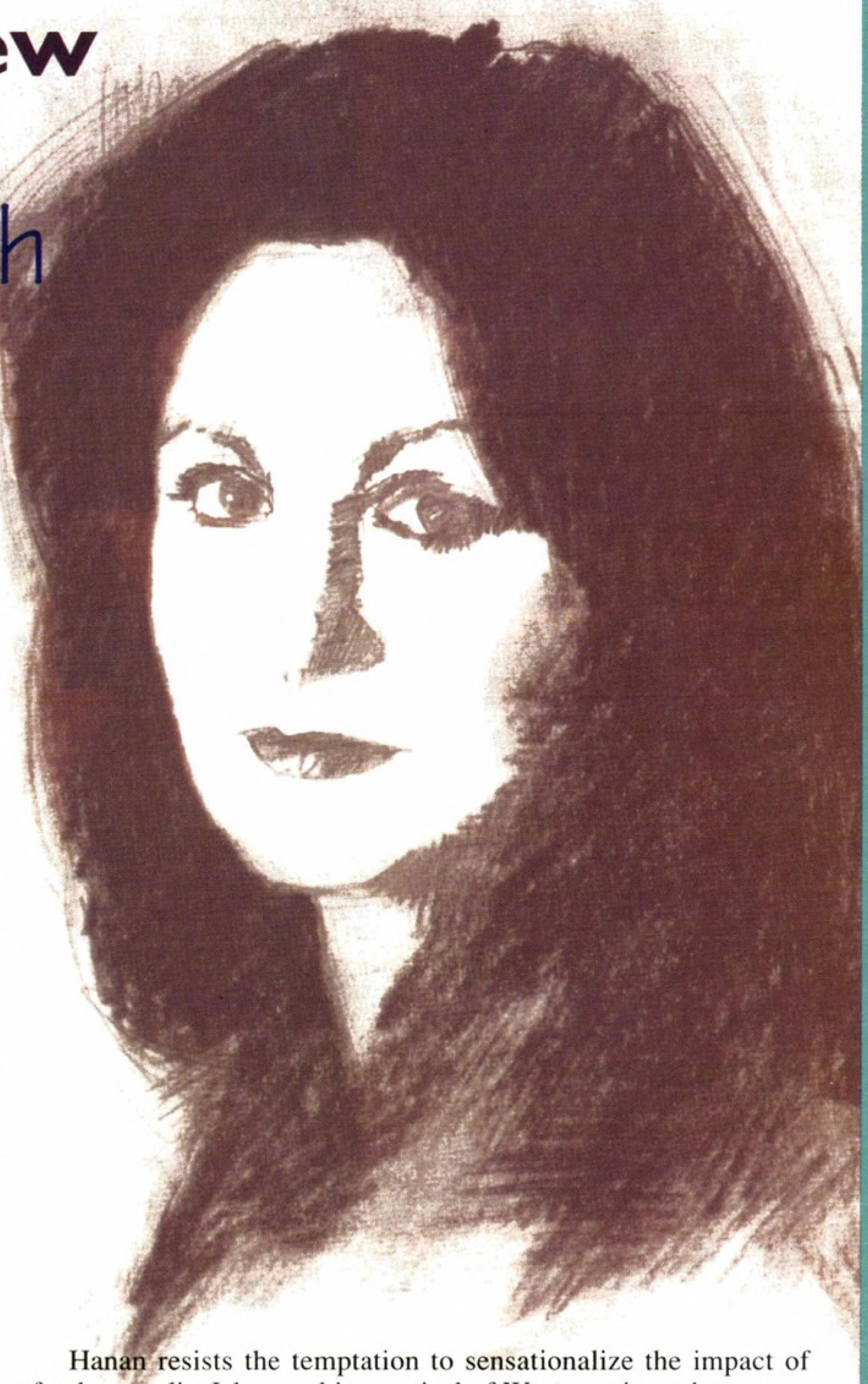
TIM NUNN

UNITED STATES

International Campaign for Tibet, 1738 I St NW, Suite 615, Washington, DC 20006. Tel: (202) 785 1515. Fax: 785 4343.
The US Tibet Committee, 241 East 32nd St, NewYork NY 10016. Tel: (212) 213 5011. Fax: 779 9245.

SPECIAL THANKS to Tim Nunn and the Tibet Support Group UK for their help with this issue.

The NI Interview



Hanan al-Shaykh

Richard Swift talks with an engaging Lebanese novelist, part of a wave of outspoken women writers emerging in the Arab world.

HANAN AL-SHAYKH sighs wearily when I ask her about public appearances like the one she is about to do at the Toronto Authors' Festival. 'I do too many, but I think it is important that the Arab world gets represented by more voices than that of Yasser Arafat.' Hanan is a small dark woman with lively eyes and a quiet voice. Her shyness is in sharp contrast to the vivid, blunt prose she uses to explore how women survive in contemporary Arab society and the wars that periodically engulf it. Words obviously mean a lot to Hanan. As we talk she pauses to make sure she has chosen the right one – all her writing is done in Arabic, the language with which she is most comfortable.

Hanan identifies two types of war in her native Lebanon. Both feature in her most recent fiction – in *The Story of Zahra* and in her new novel *Beirut Blues.* 'One is the civil war,' she says, 'the other is the war against the old customs and taboos'. While the men fight the civil war, women bear the responsibility of maintaining the family. It's this experience, says Hanan, that's sparked a remarkable explosion of writing by women. 'An American scholar found 44 women novelists whose work reflecting this war experience has appeared in print since the conflict started.'

I remark to Hanan that I found parts of *Beirut Blues* quite humorous. She seems pleasantly surprised and the hint of a slightly mischievous smile plays at the corners of her mouth. 'I like that. My mother was a great comedian, always mimicking and imitating people. I am like her but it never used to show in my work. Now I am older I feel I can be humorous.' Hanan's humour is decidedly black – in one incident in *Beirut Blues* an unexploded bomb crashes through the wall of the Beirut apartment of the main character and her grandmother. They immediately grab it and decide it should be cooked for supper.

But Hanan is anything but amused when we get to the state of fictional writing and publishing in the Arab world. 'It is not at all in healthy shape,' she claims. 'To write frankly is bound to create problems.' As an example she mentions *The Ring of the Dove,* a book by an eleventh-century Arab philosopher now being censored in Egypt – one of the Arab world's more liberal regimes. She goes on to discuss a contemporary Egyptian novelist recently censored by his publisher. 'I know him, he isn't all that daring. When it came to love-making he would just put down periods [full stops], sometimes a whole paragraph of them. When I heard he'd been censored I phoned and asked if they had removed the periods.'

'What we have in the Arab world today are defeated countries mostly ruled by dictators. We used to have a past, but not any more. Even if we want to make war we must depend on the West. So I don't understand this great fear of the fundamentalists.'

Hanan herself has had some run-ins with the censors, particularly in the conservative Gulf States. She was forced to publish *The Story of Zahra* herself after it was turned down by nine Lebanese publishers who found its bluntness about rape and lost virginity gave the 'wrong impression' of the Arab family. 'It was a very direct and angry book.' Hanan remarks dryly that the publishers soon came around after good reviews and healthy sales. Her books continue to sell well in the Arab world, particularly in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Iraq.

Hanan resists the temptation to sensationalize the impact of fundamentalist Islam and is sceptical of Western views that equate Islam with a militant and aggressive fundamentalism. 'When I hear of this threatening notion of Islam that harks back to when the Moors invaded Spain I can't help but laugh. What we have in the Arab world today are defeated countries mostly ruled by dictators. We used to have a past, but not any more. Even if we want to make war we must depend on the West. So I don't understand this great fear of the fundamentalists.'

Hanan is not frightened of how Lebanon's fundamentalists view her work. 'Mostly they do not read and are not aware of literature. These isolated fundamentalists and pro-Iranian factions have not actually changed the situation in Lebanon. Anyway, I never attack religion. I am not interested in it.'

Hanan's novels portray the pain of the divorce between the Christian East and Muslim West of a city which was traditionally the open door of the Middle East. 'I am a Shi'a and I married a Christian 27 years ago. It wasn't a big problem. My father was upset for a few days and that was it.' She has high hopes for the re-emergence of a tolerant cosmopolitan Beirut. And she points to some positive signs like the newly integrated school system.

But for the moment she lives in London and is starting to turn her literary attention to the experience of Arab immigrants in Britain. Her comedy *Dark Afternoon Tea* has already been staged and reinforces the commitment to humour in her writing. 'Humour,' she believes, 'makes everything and everybody naked'. ■

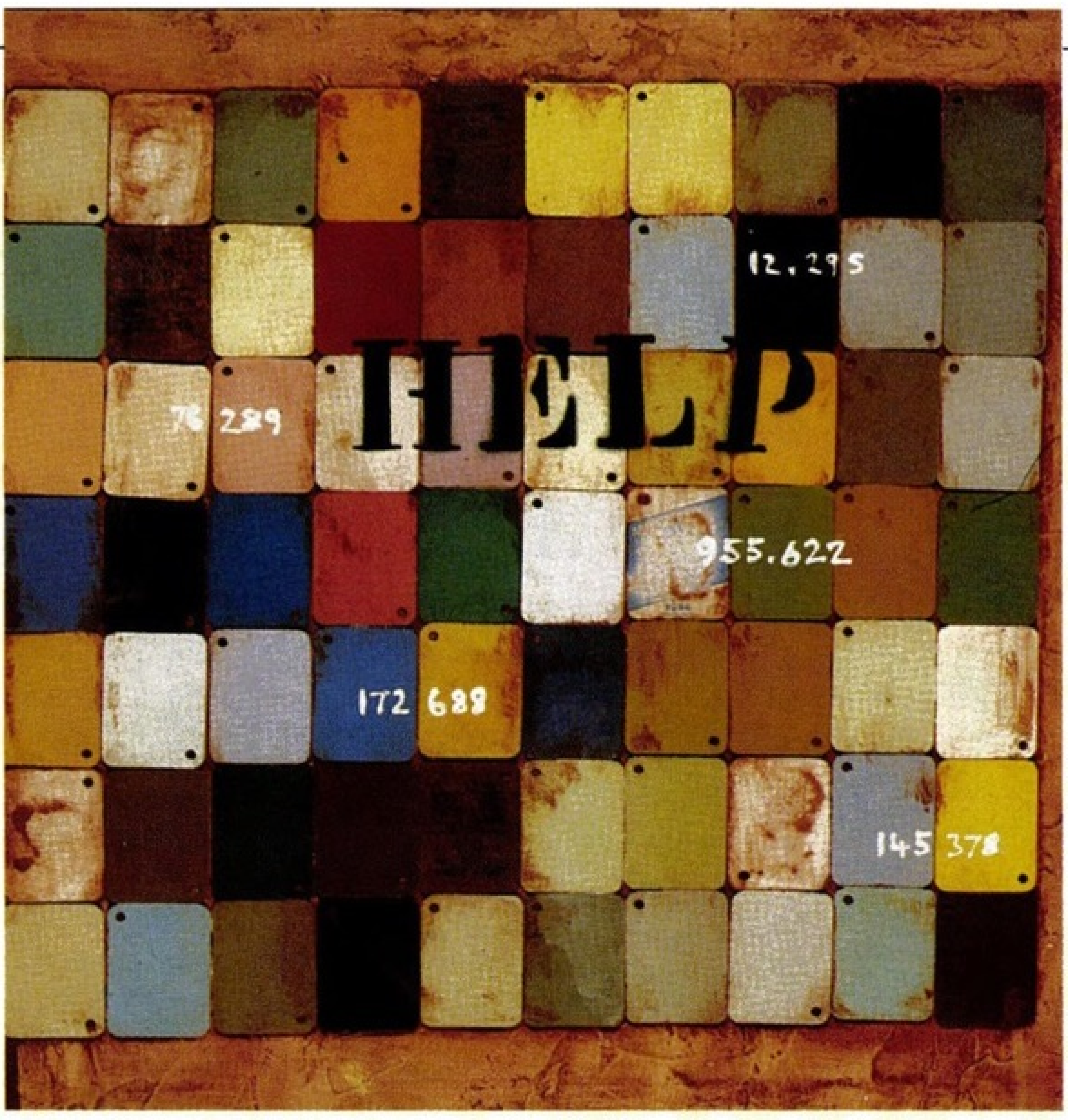
Hanan al-Shaykh's most recent novel *Beirut Blues* is published by Bantam.

Reviews

music

Help
by **Various Artists**
(Go! Discs 828 682 CD)

Fight for Your Mind
by **Ben Harper**
(Virgin CD VUS 93)



WHILE THE MUSIC industry was gathering itself behind the rousing leadership of Bob Geldorf and Live Aid, a little badge began doing the rounds. 'Charity is sadism,' it read – a sour slogan designed to enrage, and it did. One reason is that it had hit a raw nerve.

The occasion of **Help** – put together for War Child, a charity dedicated to helping Bosnia's children – once again brings up the complex relationship between music and charity. On an immediate level everyone wants **Help** to succeed – and it does. The brainchild of Go! Discs' executive Tony Crean, the album is an astonishing testament to what co-operation can achieve. Consider the logistics. On 4 September 1995, the cream of 1990s rock – including Oasis, Radiohead, Blur, Stone Roses, Neneh Cherry, Suede, Sinead O'Connor and the Mojo Filters – recorded 20 tracks in studios around Britain and other European countries. Within five days the album was in the shops and beginning a soaring sales trajectory. So far $3 million has been raised to provide a wide range of humanitarian aid to Bosnian children. Wonderful, really. And we, the buying public, are doing our bit, too.

So why, despite the abundance of 'feel-good factor', does **Help** leave me feeling ambivalent? It's something to do with the fact that such records are knee-jerk reactions to specific situations. They may unite musicians and fans alike in their concern, but this does nothing really to address the causes of conflict, disease, famine or whatever.

Ethics and efficacy aside, **Help** does produce the goods and remains a fine record. Sinead O'Connor's version of Bobbie Gentry's 'Ode to Billie Joe', Radiohead's 'Lucky' and Terry Hall and Salad's 'Dream a Little Dream of Me' are truly outstanding tracks.

Politics ☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆
LG

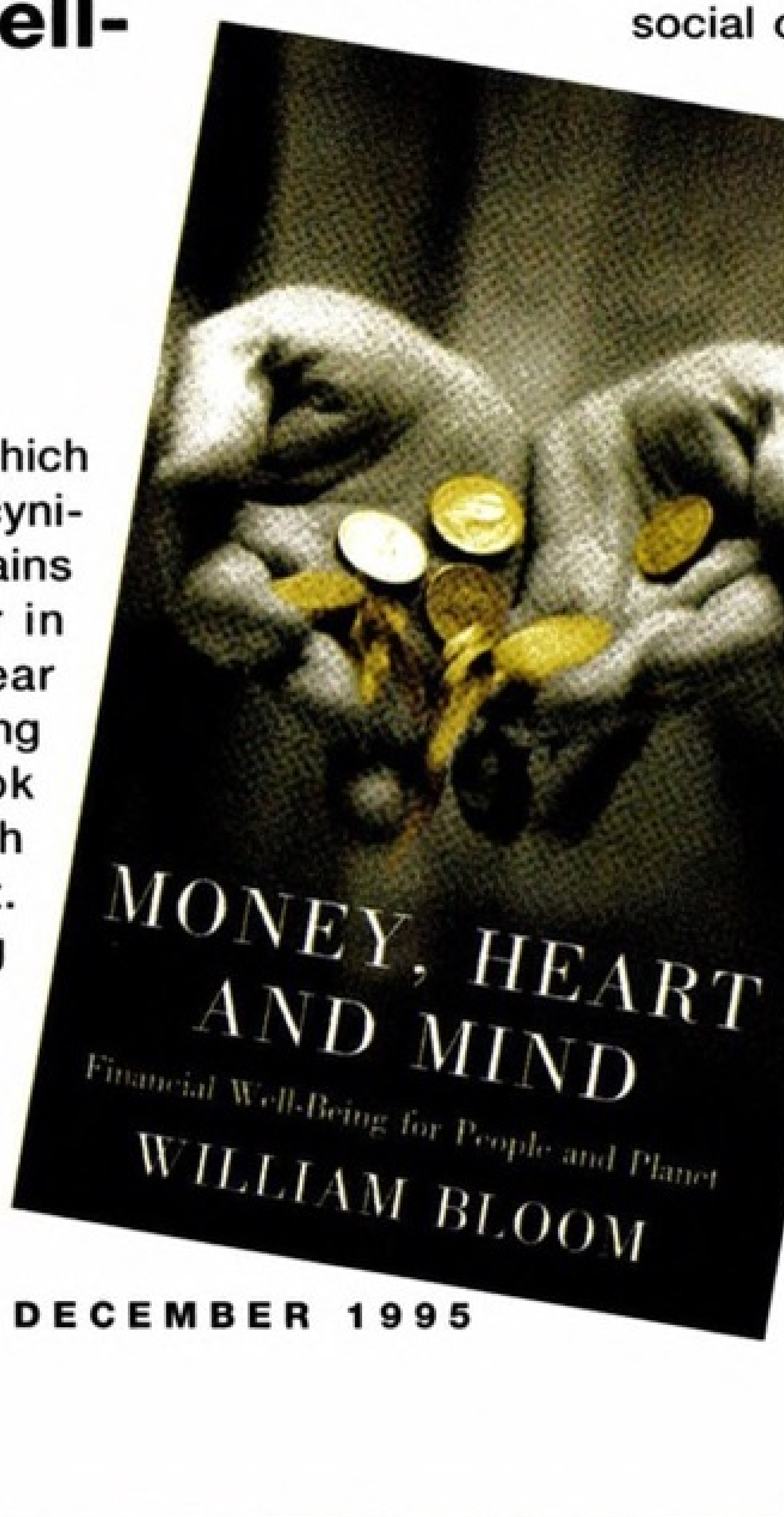
BEN HARPER has one of those immediately comfortable, embraceable soul voices that make people go up to record store staff to ask what's playing. On **Fight for Your Mind** he displays controlled versatility, in arrangements ranging from funk through blues to gospel. The playing is spare and clean, showing that a good acoustic set is capable of snatching notes from the heavens. Harper's concerns are broad – people's power and corruption, love, the environment and his Christian beliefs.

On one track a desire to leave him alone to smoke his own pot gets transfigured into a compelling plea for tolerance all round. The lyrics are straightforward, sometimes trite, but the true magic is in the voice and the music. Apart from a couple of tedious 'epic' gestures towards the end, this is an album of very accessible, somewhat wistful beauty. Something to keep you warm this winter.

Politics ☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆
UP

books

Money, Heart and Mind: Financial Well-Being for People and Planet
by **William Bloom**
(Viking/Penguin Books, ISBN 0-670-86597-4)



AT LAST A BOOK about money which doesn't entertain 'root of all evil' cynicism for long. A book which explains much of our neurotic behaviour in money matters, which makes clear the distinction between accumulating cash and creating wealth. A book which stabs the reader with moments of near-surgical insight. And written in lucid, entertaining prose, too.

However, **Money, Heart and Mind** is also a book which shies away from specifics when they are most needed to support the argument and which offers mainly optimism instead of attempting to formulate solutions. It's one of those maddening works which positively light up the page in parts and yet can be incredibly foggy elsewhere.

William Bloom succeeds admirably in urging readers to look beyond the numbers that represent money transactions to considering the people involved, the environmental and social costs, and the possible benefits. He helps us understand our fear and anxiety around money, and argues persuasively that it is in our power to make money work in positive ways.

There is also a useful discussion on co-operation in tribal communities and the factors in modern society that have allowed the kind of competition which corners money by dispossessing others.

Money needs to flow; it needs to be a marker of meaningful exchange, of human creativity, according to Bloom. Though this compassionate view is desirable, it leads him to making some boggling assertions. Such as: 'It is the human enjoyment of creation, exchange, communication and relationship which creates the market – *not* the need to trade.'

In highlighting our supposed preference for co-operation, he seems to suggest that the systemic exploitation of one people by another which characterizes so much of human history happens because ordinary people are uninformed rather than apathetic.

Though both the very rich and the very poor are often mentioned, the book constantly – and cosily – appeals to the middle-class reader's conscience and choices. Bloom views the Internet as a tool for increased access to corporate information and sees the economic monoliths breaking down. It would have been nice if he could have given just one example. He concludes by eschewing apocalyptic visions for the planet's economic systems, simply stating that they have to change for the better. For the hows and whys, search elsewhere.

Politics ☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆
UP

film

The White Balloon

directed by **Jafar Panahi**

IRANIAN DIRECTOR Jafar Panahi's debut feature follows a beautifully simple story of a little girl Razieh (Aida Mohammadkhani) and her quest to buy a plump white goldfish before Tehran closes for the New Year. It's a tense and gripping race against the clock, with the film taking place in real time – the 85 minutes leading up to the holiday. As such it's documentary-like in its observations of life on the streets in the Iranian capital. The fact that all the actors are non-professionals, from whom Panahi coaxes the most nuanced of performances, adds to the naturalistic texture of the film. **White Balloon** begins with Razieh and her mother doing some last-minute shopping. Wandering into a pet shop, Razieh decides that she wants one of the fish and starts nagging her mother. When they get home her mother relents on condition that her daughter brings back every ounce of change from the banknote she gives her. However, the journey to the pet shop is full of distractions and Razieh is easily sidetracked by snake-charmers and cake shops. Then calamity strikes: she realizes she has lost the money.

Panahi's film follows a picaresque-style structure as the child learns from many encounters on her quest – including the young Afghan refugee balloon-seller who comes to her aid. It's an evocative piece: the brief exchanges between the wearied mother and the demanding father – who we only hear off screen – speak volumes about family life.

Politics ☆☆☆

Entertainment ☆☆☆☆ LF

Reviewers: Louise Gray, Urvi Patel, Lizzie Francke.

STAR RATING

Excellent	☆☆☆☆☆
Very good	☆☆☆☆
Good	☆☆☆
Fair	☆☆
Poor	☆

Reviews editor: **Vanessa Baird**

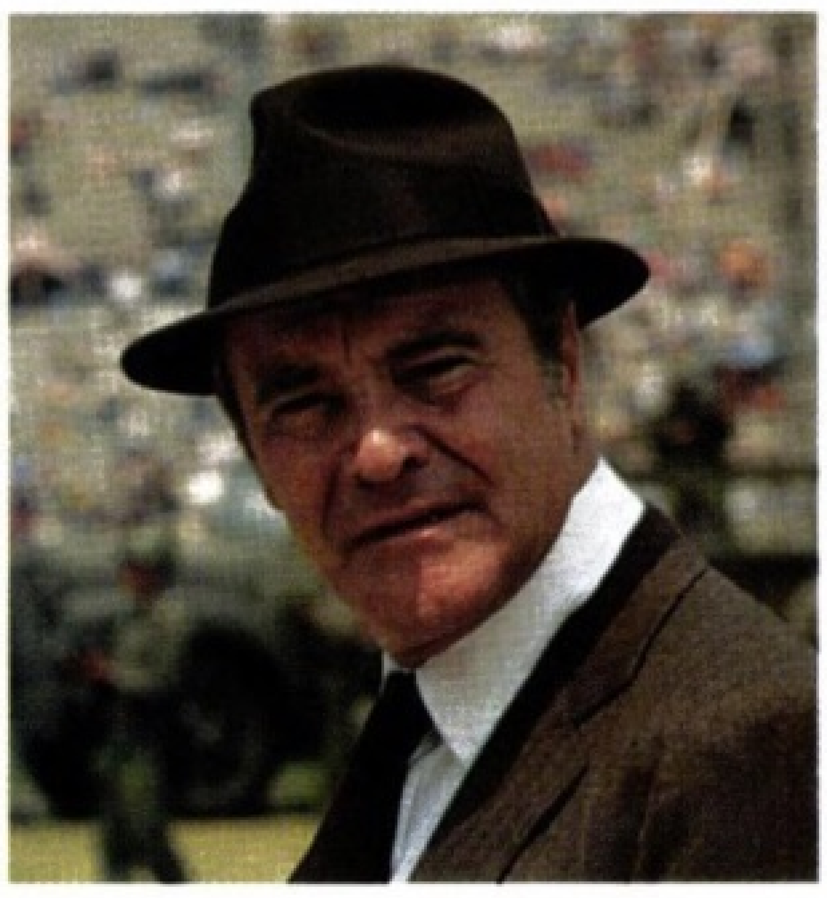
THE **CLASSIC**

Missing

...being the film that touched hearts and showed that the personal and the political are inseparable.

FOR MY GENERATION – cynical thirty-somethings swimming through the flotsam of old certainties – there is a wide choice of defining moments: the events that crystallized our dawning recognition that in a tough world idealism is insufficient. High on the list for many people must be the US-orchestrated 1973 coup in Chile. The country had gained a reputation as an island of stable democracy in a region better known for dictators and tinpot military regimes. In 1970 Salvador Allende came to power as head of a broad coalition including liberal and centrist elements as well as communists and members of his own Socialist Party.

Such distinctions were lost on the Cold War ideologues in the Nixon administration who almost immediately started plotting to topple Allende. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger famously remarked that he didn't see why the US should stand by and 'let a country go communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people'. The coup duly followed, bringing murder, torture, repression and misery.



Jack Lemmon at his best.

But such broad-brush history does not touch hearts or change minds: to do that it is necessary to bring great events down to the personal, something director Costa-Gavras achieved brilliantly in his 1981 film, **Missing**. Costa-Gavras' work has always fused politics and drama. His earlier films, *State of Siege* and *Z* were fast-moving, semi-documentary in style and committed to the causes of the Left. In **Missing** he infiltrates the mainstream, with a large budget, well-known actors and a top-notch plot. It tells the story of Charles Horman, a young idealistic US journalist living in Chile. At the time of the coup he is holidaying in the coastal town of Viña del Mar where he meets several US military types who let slip more than is wise about their own and their country's involvement in the overthrow of Allende. Charles notes down their comments. Five days later he is dragged from his home by Chilean soldiers. His frantic wife searches for him in the sinister aftermath of the military take-over. Desperate for any help she meets only evasion and bland reassurances from US Embassy officials. Charles's father, Ed, flies to Chile in an attempt to unravel his son's disappearance.

Conservative and deeply religious, Ed is not disposed to disbelieve representatives of his government but gradually and unwillingly he realizes that he is being duped. Embarking on his own investigation he retraces Charles's life, following the trail from the meeting with the US military 'advisers ' to the Santiago Stadium to the city morgue. In a heartrending scene Ed scours the morgue's chill corridors, searching among hundreds of mutilated corpses for the face of his son, hoping to find something but relieved to be spared the horrific moment of recognition. In the maze of bureaucratic deceit the Hormans finally find an answer of sorts – the US Embassy informs them that Charles's body had been identified by his fingerprints as one 'found' on the streets by the military, killed, they claim, by 'leftist guerrillas'. The final irony comes when the new regime, having murdered a President, takes refuge in legality to stall the return of Charles's body. They claim that 'sanitary regulations' forbid the transportation of decomposing corpses, offering cremation or return of the bones instead – presumably to cover signs of torture – and as a final twist, demanding $900 for transportation costs.

The force of Costa-Gavras' film lies in the moral and political urgency of the story and the way it subtly reveals the intertwined worlds of the diplomatic functionary and the military executioner. The central performances from Sissy Spacek, as Charles's wife Joyce, and Jack Lemmon as Ed Horman are both detailed and deeply moving. Lemmon has never had a better role nor performed with such conviction. Costa-Gavras graphically portrays the climate of fear that the coup unleashed on Chile, shooting scenes with overlapping foci in which ominous, silent shapes suddenly explode into noise and violence. In one emblematic moment a terrified white horse is chased through the streets of Santiago by jeeps full of soldiers – a heavy-handed piece of symbolism were it not an actual incident documented by several eyewitnesses.

I know of no other film that so vividly illustrates the interconnectedness of moral principles. In **Missing** the Horman family's realization that 'people who are loved can be killed' underlined the sombre truth that the personal is inseparable from the political.

As Charles's mother says: 'His death taught me the lesson of political responsibility. I used to think that I could till the soil on my own little plot of land and let the rest of the world take care of its own problems... I was wrong. I know now that each of us is obligated to fight for what is right and take responsibility for what our government does. If we don't, sooner or later it will affect us all.' ■

Peter Whittaker

Missing directed by **Costa-Gavras** was released by Universal in 1981.

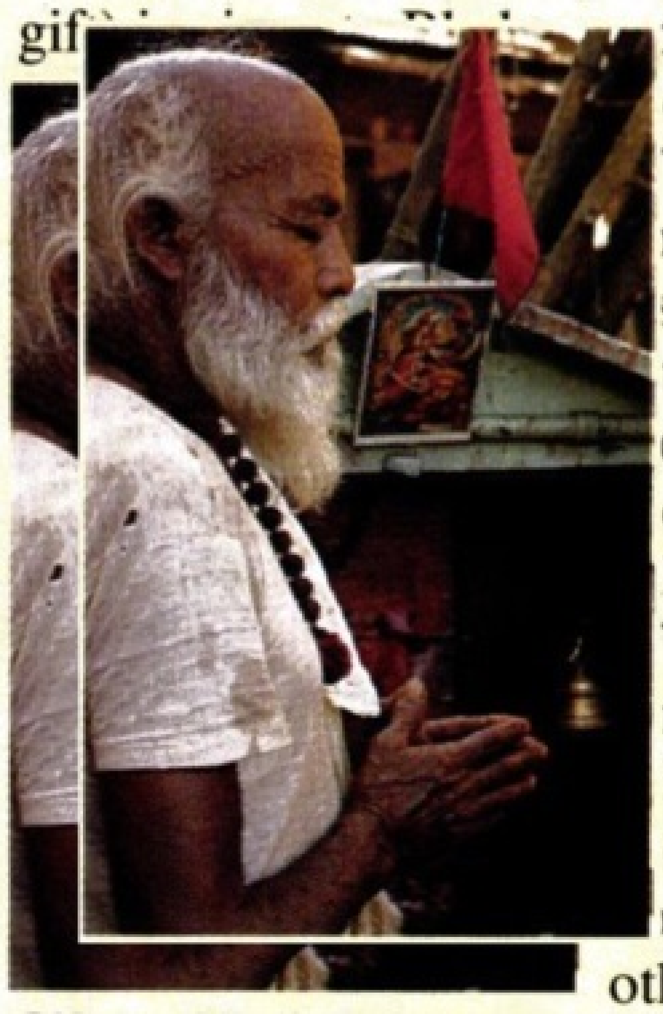
Curiosities

QUESTIONS THAT HAVE ALWAYS INTRIGUED YOU ABOUT THE WORLD WILL APPEAR IN THIS, YOUR SECTION, AND BE ANSWERED BY OTHER READERS. PLEASE ADDRESS YOUR ANSWERS AND QUESTIONS TO 'CURIOSITIES'.

Are there any cultures in the world where there is never any reason to exchange gifts?

- I think people will always find reasons for exchanging gifts. But there are cases where reciprocity is not desirable or appropriate.

In India, for example, *dana* (cash or a gif)riests. Since *dana* ontains' the sins ' the giver, it must ot be reciprocated st the sins are also turned. In Papua ew Guinea 'big en' give away bstantial amounts ' goods in return r allegiance from hers. However, ey are actually ompeting with other 'big men' for prestige, trying to outdo rivals rather than exchange equally. It could also be argued that charitable giving rests on the premise of non-reciprocity. Blood donation is an interesting example, though it has been argued that people do 'get something back' in the form of feeling a part of society.


ASHA SPAAK / CAMERA PRESS

Gifts to Hindu priests come with sins attached.

The controversy around selling human organs or embryos may well relate in part to an uncertainty about whether such things are 'gifts' or 'commodities' and whether 'exchange' is appropriate. Further reading on gifts, commodities and exchange is extensive: as a starting point, I suggest the classic text by Mauss, called *The Gift*. An absorbing and more contemporary suggestion would be *Money and Morality of Exchange* by Bloch and Parry.

Joni Wilson
Edinburgh, Scotland

- Gift exchange is a concept alien to all cetacean cultures, unless one counts intangible gifts such as whale-song.

Jonathan Cardy
Teddington, England

What evidence is there that children vaccinated against measles, mumps and rubella at an early age will enjoy lasting immunity? What is the risk of their developing these diseases in later life, when they can be more serious?

- I thought the 'answer' given by Peter Holdsworth in **NI 271** was dangerous, false and biased.

Measles deaths have reduced from 2.5 million a year in 1980 to 1.0 million now. It's still far too high, and effective immunization must continue (see UNICEF *State of the World's Children*). Of course malnutrition greatly increases susceptibility and must be combated too.

Dr JH Hirshman
University of New South Wales, Australia

Where does one get the seeds to grow a seedless grape vine?

- There are no seeds – the vines are grown by vegetative propagation. I very much doubt that seedless grape vines are available to the public.

BM Coote
Lower Hutt, Aotearoa/NZ

AWAITING YOUR ANSWERS

What proportion of Muslim women cover their faces in public? Is the practice increasing? And do women who cover their faces suffer any discomfort or health problems?

Sandra Mariner
Taunton, England

At work we use the term 'Spanish custom' when highlighting the use of a procedure that has not been documented in one of our many rule books? Where has the term come from?

Louise Funnell
Bristol, England

Why in most communities in the world do women live longer than men?

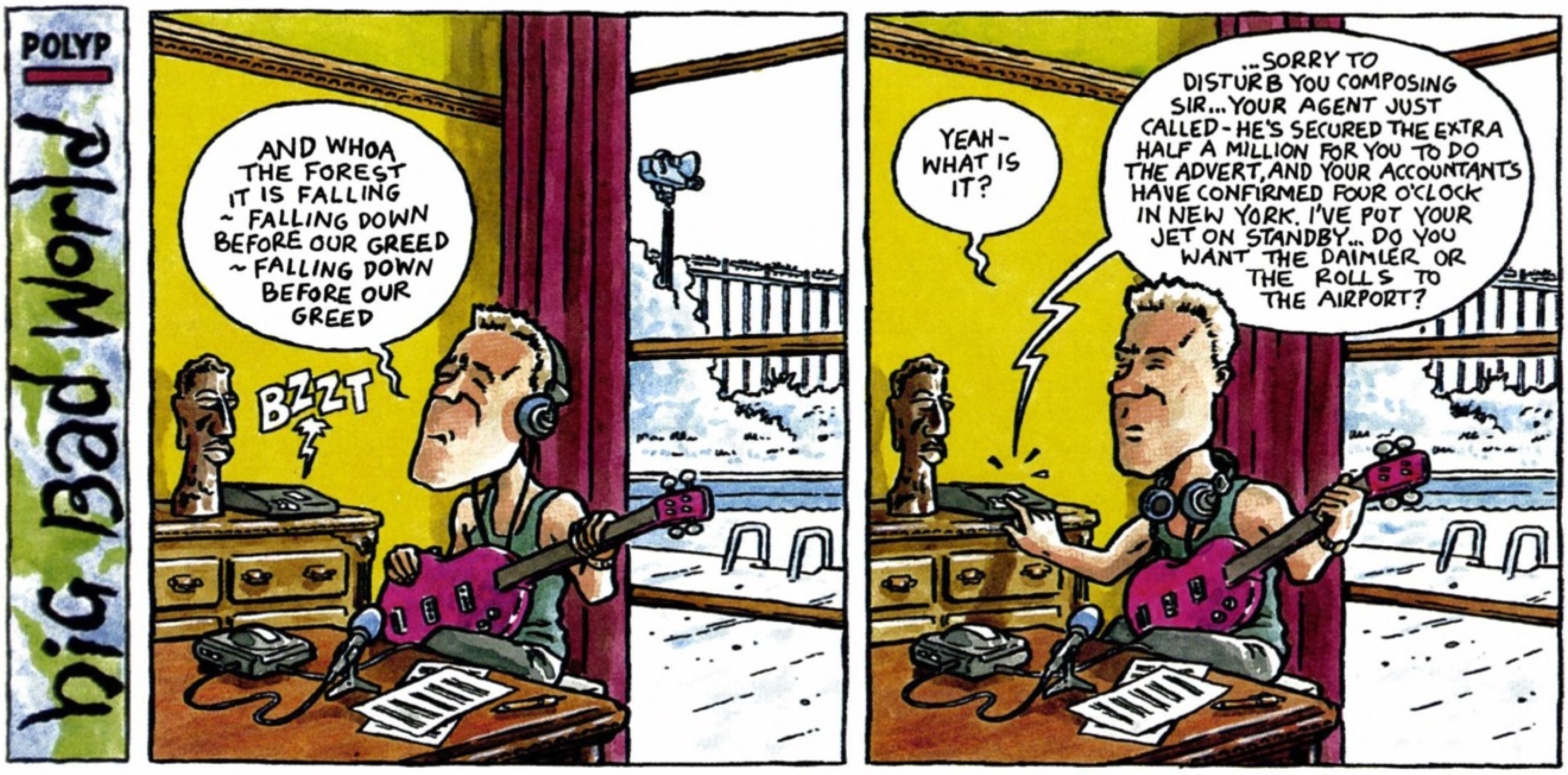
Eric Marsh
Tasmania, Australia.

What proportion of the earth's arable land is currently used for the cultivation of drugs and stimulants, including coffee, tea, tobacco, grapes, hops, marijuana, coca and opium?

Klaus Graichen
London, England

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR ANSWERS PLEASE SEND THEM TO **CURIOSITIES, NEW INTERNATIONALIST, 55 RECTORY ROAD, OXFORD OX4 1BW, UK,** OR TO YOUR LOCAL NI OFFICE (SEE INSIDE FRONT COVER FOR ADDRESSES).

The views expressed on this page are not necessarily those of the **New Internationalist.**

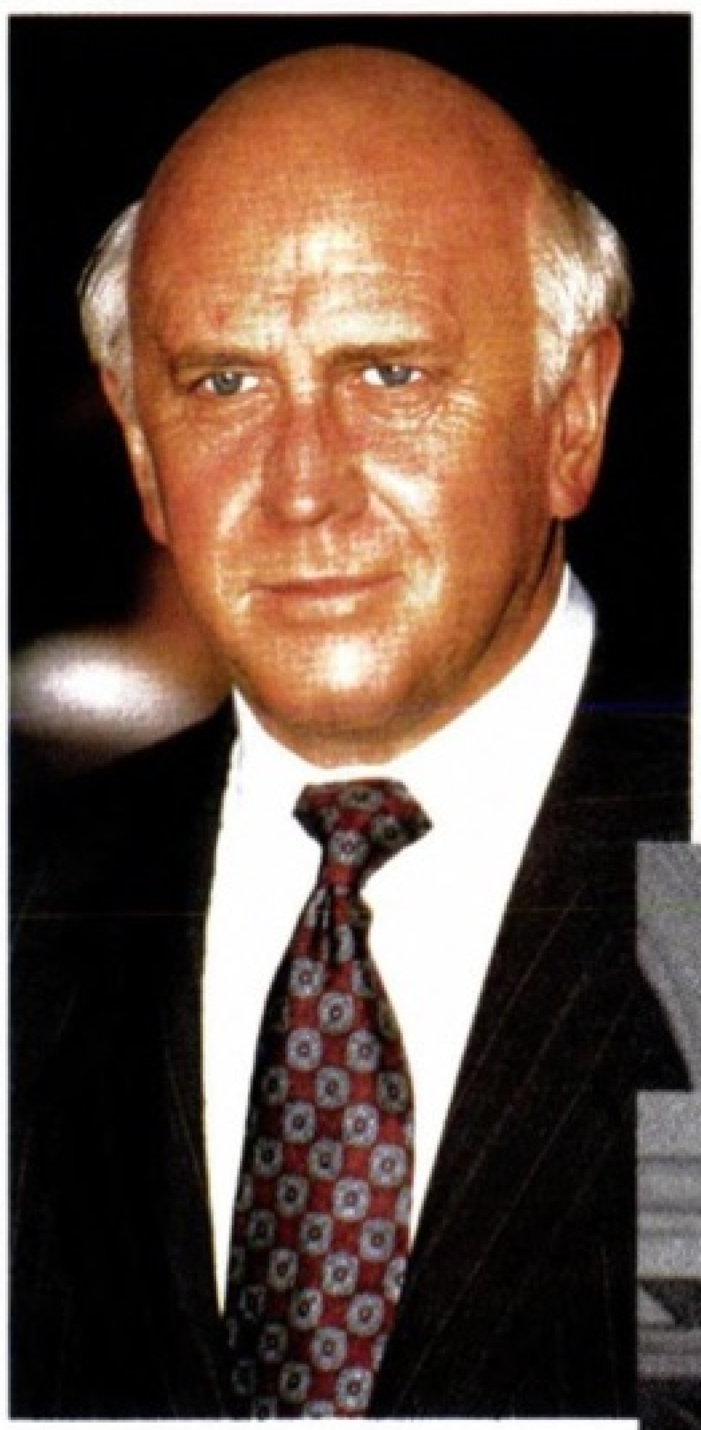

POLYP
big Bad World
AND WHOA THE FOREST IT IS FALLING ~ FALLING DOWN BEFORE OUR GREED ~ FALLING DOWN BEFORE OUR GREED
BZZT
YEAH - WHAT IS IT?
...SORRY TO DISTURB YOU COMPOSING SIR... YOUR AGENT JUST CALLED - HE'S SECURED THE EXTRA HALF A MILLION FOR YOU TO DO THE ADVERT, AND YOUR ACCOUNTANTS HAVE CONFIRMED FOUR O'CLOCK IN NEW YORK. I'VE PUT YOUR JET ON STANDBY... DO YOU WANT THE DAIMLER OR THE ROLLS TO THE AIRPORT?

ENDPIECE

De Klerk of Unionism

Does Northern Ireland have anything to learn from South Africa? **Gavin Evans** compares the position of David Trimble, the new hardline boss of Ulster Unionism, with that of FW de Klerk, the last white-rule boss of South Africa.

THE SEARCH IS ON IN NORTHERN IRELAND for an illusive hero, the 'de Klerk of Unionism'. He has yet to be found. The one place not to look – or so we are told – is David Trimble's office. The truth is, however, that there is a good deal more in common between the two party leaders than conventional wisdom might suggest.



'Hard-liners' with something in common: FW de Klerk (top); and the new leader of the Ulster Unionists, David Trimble (bottom).

TOP PHOTO: STUART MARK / CAMERA PRESS; BOTTOM: ????????????????

When 'FW' rose to power he was an apartheid hardliner, viewed as a counterweight to the ultra-right Conservative Party. He was opposed to any compromise with majority rule and to this day remains ill at ease with black people. He was very much a grassroots party stalwart as well as being a leader of the Broederbond, a secret Afrikaner society which, like the Orange Order, was losing influence. He was an outsider to the reformist but authoritarian clique around his predecessor PW Botha, who opposed him vigorously. He was a clean-living, bright and articulate young lawyer, sharp and tough enough to take on the world. You could paint a very similar picture of David Trimble.

Far more pertinent than the superficial similarities, however, is the difference in the political mix. De Klerk realized that his government could not hold out against the forces pushing to end white rule. Mass political revolt and financial sanctions were making the country ungovernable. In contrast, Northern Ireland is flourishing with new investment. Britain may have arrived at the conclusion that a gradual transition to a united Ireland is desirable, but is constrained by past commitments and internal political considerations from spelling this out.

In a united Ireland the percentage of Protestants in the population as a whole would be comparable with the 23 per cent of non-Africans in South Africa. Unfortunately for the nationalists, however, the gerrymandering that gave rise to the six counties in 1922 has rather more profound resonance than apartheid's partition policy. In Northern Ireland Protestants still comprise close to 60 per cent of the population, and that reality gives Trimble leeway that de Klerk never enjoyed.

While the IRA had a more sophisticated and successful military strategy than the ANC, Sinn Fein is far weaker in its political reach, and there has been little attempt to sell the 'Pan Nationalist Front' beyond its Catholic confine. Despite nationalist claims to have a secular agenda, in practice their approach to politics remains tribal.

This is one lesson Gerry Adams and John Hume could well learn from the anti-apartheid forces: the importance of working within the opposition community. The ANC had a strong white presence in its leadership corps and thousands of supporters working within white-based organizations to build a bridgehead for majority rule – a factor which contributed to 'enemy' divisions in the negotiation period. In contrast, Irish nationalists face an opponent which remains united in terms of basic support for the Union. As a result, although the gap between white and black in South Africa (in terms of income, culture, language and education) was far wider than between Catholic and Protestant in Northern Ireland, the Unionists have yet to feel a comparable impetus for change.

By unbanning the ANC de Klerk hoped to secure the kind of peace that would provide all the benefits of ending the siege without the drawback of conceding real power. In the five years of his rule 13,000 people died in political violence. It is now beyond dispute that he knew what his security forces were up to, who was calling the shots, and that he could have done more to stop it. David Trimble has neither the power nor the inclination to follow this less savoury aspect of the de Klerk legacy.

There are, nonetheless, useful lessons for Northern Ireland from the 'FW' approach. One comes with the issue of surrendering arms. In South Africa violence from all sides continued throughout the negotiation process; it took two years of top-level talking before the ANC revealed its first arms caches. Watching the Northern Ireland peace process from the outside it is hard to come to any other conclusion than that the demand for an IRA arms handover *before* talks begin rests more on political expedience than on principle, and can only result in a stalling of the peace process.

In Ireland, as in South Africa, there is an inevitability about fundamental change which cannot be escaped. So often I have heard northern Unionists say that the situation is really far more complex than we foreigners appreciate. Exactly the same things, very often in identical words, were said by white South Africans. But, as de Klerk belatedly came to realize, simplistic international perceptions can turn out to be rather more realistic and accurate than the intricate home-ground prejudices.

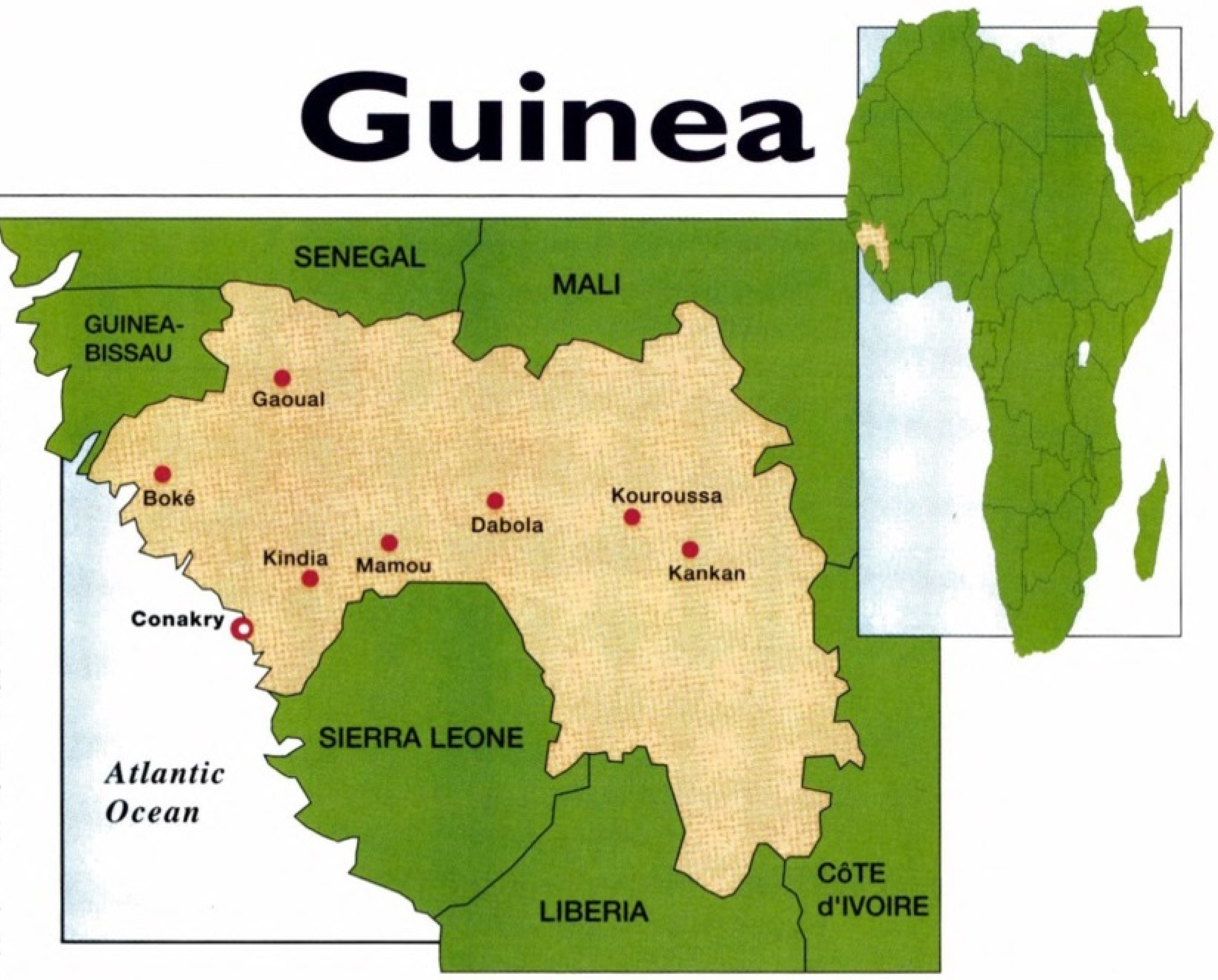
While the political pressures in Northern Ireland may be different, in the long term the economics of the island and the changing demographics of its northern corner seem to make a certainty of the eventual transition to single nationhood, albeit with provision for a high level of regional and religious autonomy. The forces pulling people together appear more resilient than the prejudices keeping them apart. Geographical logic will have its way with historical folly.

De Klerk the heel-digger of the 1980's only became de Klerk the power-sharer of the 1990's because he was smart enough to realize his options were narrowing. In the end, after resisting it for so long, he cut a deal that was not to his liking because, basically, he had no choice. If David Trimble can learn to smell the roses a bit earlier in his reign he will be doing his party, his cause and perhaps even himself one huge favour. ■

Gavin Evans, for ten years a member of the ANC, worked as a journalist in South Africa and now lives in London, reporting regularly on Northern Ireland.

Country profile

Guinea



THERE IS A popular saying in Guinea that any visitor who fails to shop at the historic Madina market has not been to the capital, Conakry. Sprawling over a strategic central area of the city where trains, trucks, buses, taxis and shoppers struggle for space, Madina is an international trading centre as well as the popular choice of locals. Labourers as young as 12 years old skilfully manoeuvre wheelbarrows on shuttle trips through the crowds. Everything is for sale, from cars through black-market currency to cups of drinking water.

This bustling private-sector activity would be music to the ears of the IMF which, as in most African countries, has insisted since the mid-1980s on a structural-adjustment programme in return for new loans. The story is familiar: the state subsidy on rice (the local staple) has been removed and wage cuts have taken their toll on ordinary citizens. Thousands of workers have been made redundant by the State, the largest employer in the former French colony. Privatization has resulted in Guinea's electricity system being controlled by a Franco-Canadian consortium involving Hydro-Québec.

At independence in 1958 Guinea was one of Africa's showpieces. The revolutionary style of its first leader, Ahmed Sekou Touré, echoed throughout the continent. Touré was famous for refusing to accept independence on French terms: 'We'd rather be poor and free than rich and enslaved,' he memorably maintained, and for that alone he remains a legendary figure in the minds of most Guineans. Soon after independence Sekou Touré turned to the socialist bloc for succour but the country eventually slumped into virtual (and ruinous) isolation from the outside world.

A week after Sekou Touré's death in 1984 there was a bloodless coup by soldiers promising a new deal. Hundreds of political detainees were released and many exiles were confident enough to return home. But the more telling statement of intent was the immediate decision to join the once-spurned French African monetary community.

Colonel Conté has metamorphosed now into a civilian president via elections in 1993 but in practice the activity of opposition forces is still limited by the military. The main emphasis has been on economic change and the IMF-inspired efforts to diversify the economy away from its dependence on earnings from bauxite have had mixed results. Guinea's coffee industry is still throttled by the country's poor communications, particularly during the rainy season, and now faces a new threat from other countries' Arabica coffee, which is claimed to contain less caffeine than Guinea's Robusta variety.

The gap between rich and poor is growing. In many areas slums surround towering villas and rich estates. Here there is an overpowering feeling of fear among the rich and of scorn from the less fortunate. The ghetto communities have a popular saying: 'Our time will come when justice will be done'. ■

Michael Butscher

AT A GLANCE

M BUTSCHER

Leader President Lansana Conté

Economy GNP per capita $510 (US $22,240)

Monetary unit: French Africa community franc (CFA)

Main exports: Bauxite, diamonds and aluminium – mining accounts for 25% of GNP and almost all export earnings. Guinea has huge deposits of unexplored mineral wealth.

Main imports: Foodstuffs, machinery, petroleum products.

People 6.3 million. Population growth rate 2.7%.

Health Infant mortality 133 per 1,000 births (Australia 7 per 1,000). Doctors: 1 for every 46,420 people (US 1 for 420).

Culture Mainly Fulani, Malinke and Susu. Formerly part of the Mali empire which flourished between the seventh and fifteenth centuries.

Religion: Muslim 85%, Christian 10%

Languages: French is the official language but there are many indigenous languages.

***Sources:** The World: A Third World Guide 1995/96; State of the World's Children 1995; Africa Review 1995; The World's Women 1970-1990, United Nations.*

Previously profiled August 1984.

NI star rating

EXCELLENT	★★★★★
GOOD	★★★★
FAIR	★★★
POOR	★★
APPALLING	★

STAR RATINGS

INCOME DISTRIBUTION

★

90% of people are desperately poor, especially in the rural areas.

1984 ★★

SELF-RELIANCE

★★★

Reasonable despite $2.9 billion debt. The strain of refugees from Sierra Leone and Liberia is taking its toll.

1984 ★★

POSITION OF WOMEN

★★

Girls' enrolment in primary school as a percentage of boys' is more or less unchanged since 1980. Women are marginalized throughout society.

1984 ★★★★

LITERACY

★

At just 24%, the third lowest in the world.

1984 ★★

FREEDOM

★★

Major improvement over Sekou Touré's regime but government opponents are still detained and harassed. The death penalty is in force. Journalists are under constant pressure and radio and TV are government-owned.

1984 ★

LIFE EXPECTANCY

★

At 45 years, the sixth lowest in the world (Canada 77 years).

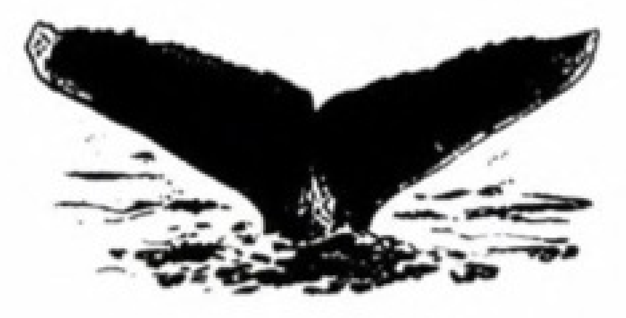
1984 ★★

POLITICS

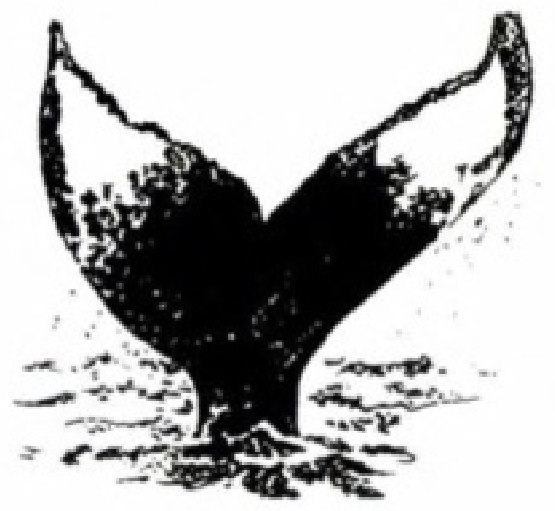
NI ASSESSMENT ★★

Lansana Conté won the election with a majority on the first ballot – but might well have lost in a second round had his party not had results in two opposition strongholds annulled for supposed irregularities. His pretence at multiparty democracy is enough for the West – but not for most Guineans, especially the poor who have borne the brunt of structural adjustment.

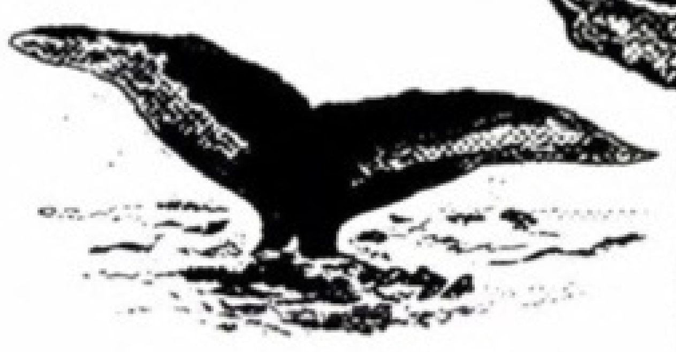
All Whales are recognised by their tails. *You can choose the Whale you would like to adopt from our fully detailed Whale Adoption List* **sent with every kit.**



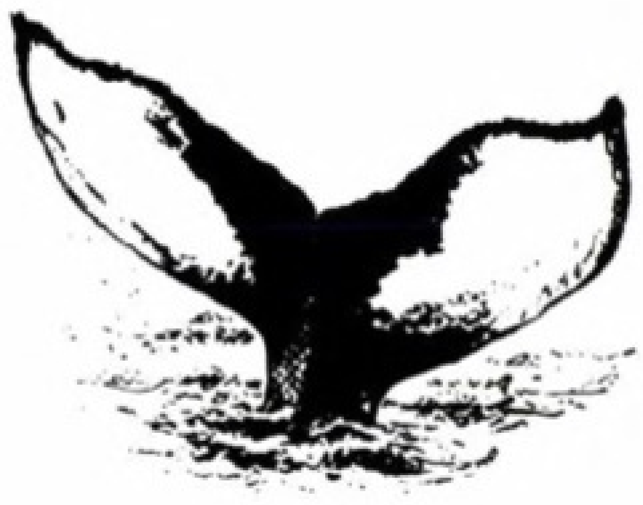
CATS PAWS
A mature female with calves. She is best known for spectacular feeding displays, where she lunges vertically from the water.



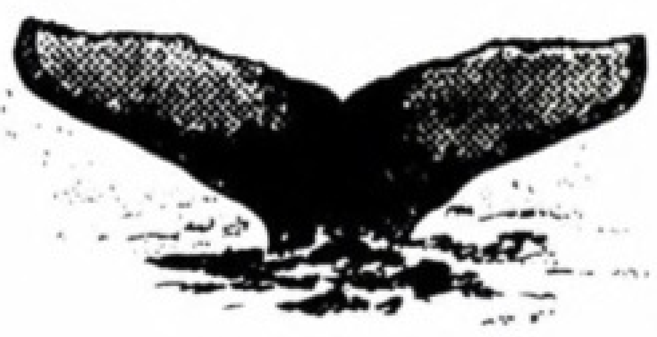
COLT
One of the best known males in the study group, he constantly approaches very close to whale watch and research boats.



ORBIT
This female was first seen in 1979. She became somewhat of a loner until the birth of her first calf in 1984.



BAT
A large female seen on Stellwagen Bank as well as The Caribbean. She was photographed with her first known calf in 1990.



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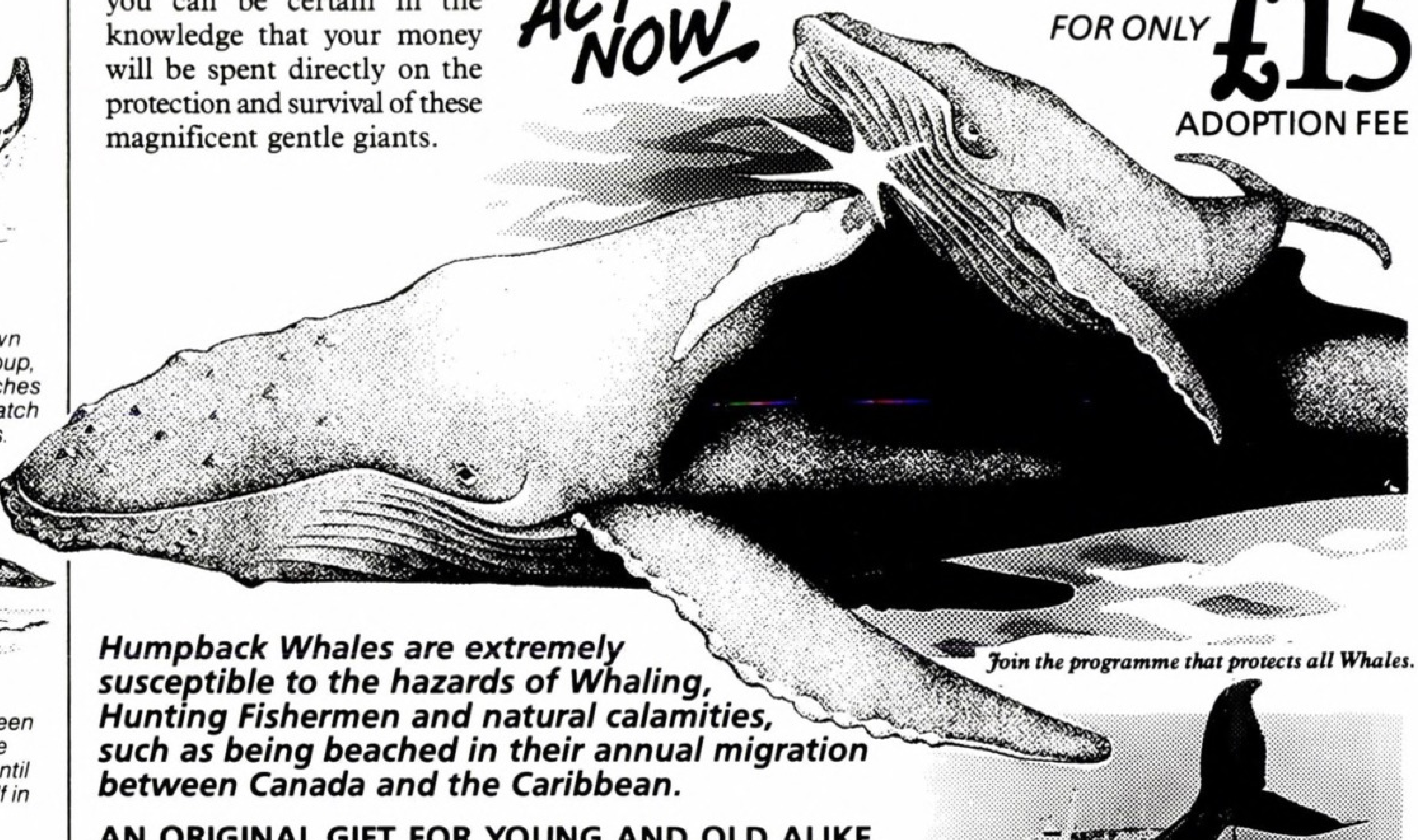

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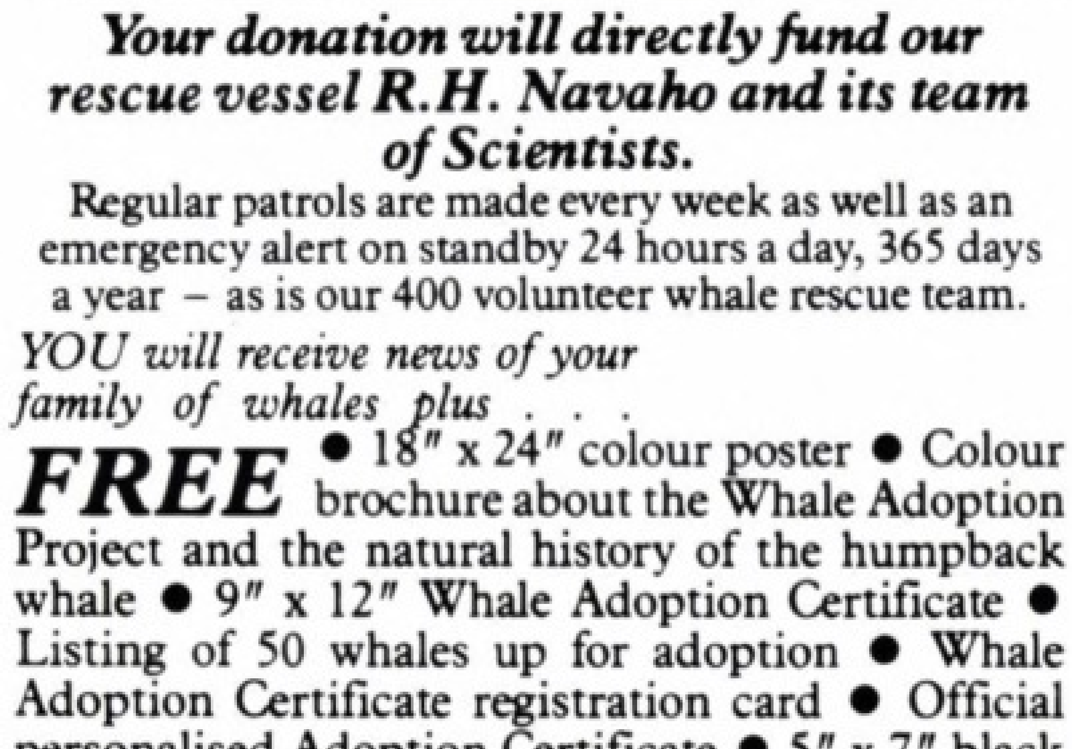

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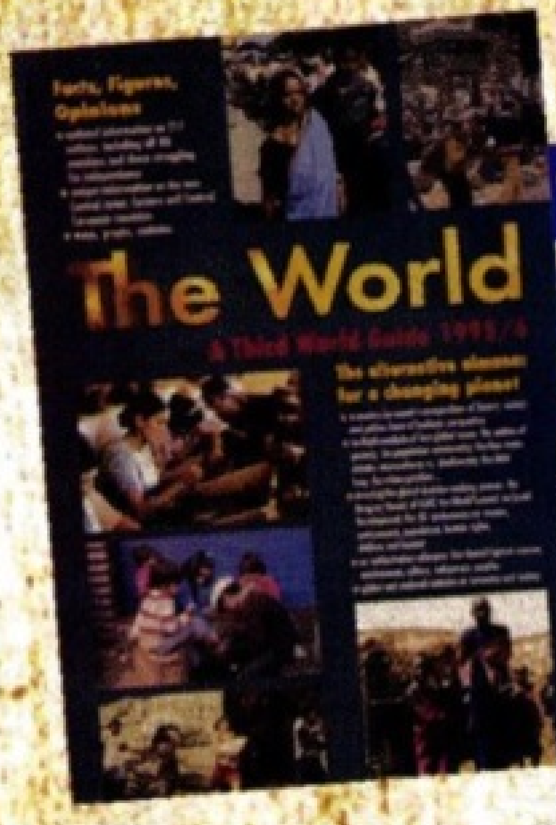

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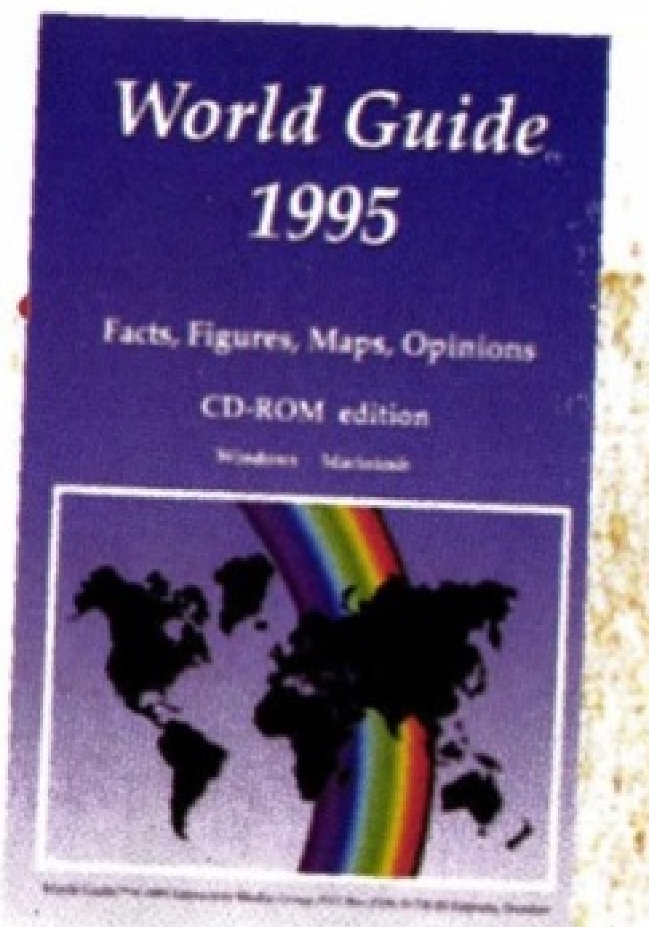

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